

XVIIth INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS CONFERENCE
Stockholm, August 1948

REPORT
of the
International Committee of the Red Cross
on its activities
during the Second World War
(September 1, 1939-June 30, 1947)

VOLUME II

THE CENTRAL AGENCY FOR
PRISONERS OF WAR



GENEVA
May 1948

No. 2A

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INTRODUCTION

ORIGIN AND FOUNDATION

The experience of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the service of prisoners of war is relatively recent. Whereas the Committee encouraged and sanctioned the formation in Basle, in 1870, of an information bureau for PW in addition to the official Agency for wounded combatants, and while its Belgrade Agency in 1912 worked for prisoners of war as well as for the sick and wounded, it was the International Prisoners of War Agency, opened in Geneva in 1914, which first gave the Committee the opportunity of dealing with the vast and complex problem of ensuring protection to prisoners of war, civilian internees and civil populations, of supplying information about them and of reaching them with relief.

In 1914, the only guide which the ICRC had in the new task it was undertaking, was the few lines of a resolution of the Ninth International Red Cross Conference held in Washington in 1912, which applied rather to National Societies than to the Committee. From this small beginning, the Committee went forward into an enterprise, of which it was unable to suspect the scope and growth. A few friends joined together under the President, Gustave Ador, to sort the mail. A year later, there were 1,200 workers at the International Prisoners of War Agency, which occupied the premises and basement of a museum, and soon spread into several neighbouring buildings.

This continuous expansion was made necessary by the increase in the number of countries drawn into the war. To the initial Belgian, British, French and German National Sections were added Bulgarian, Portuguese, Rumanian, Serbian,

Turkish and United States Sections. An Austro-Hungarian Section looked after Austrian and Hungarian members of the forces fighting on the Western front. An agreement between Italy and Austria ensured a direct exchange of information on PW, and made it unnecessary for there to be more than a skeleton Italian Section at Geneva. As regards the Eastern front, the Danish Red Cross had agreed, by request of the ICRC, to be responsible for such matters in this area, and an Agency was set up for the purpose in Copenhagen.

A Civilian Section dealt with cases relating to civilian internees in various countries, and ensured an exchange of news with the civil population of invaded territories.

Prisoner of war relief work remained outside the province of the Agency. A transport firm ensured free of charge the forwarding in transit of parcels coming through Geneva ; the greater part of consignments for PW were in any case sent through the Netherlands.

The experience gained by the ICRC during the first World War led it to propose to the Powers that the 1906 Geneva Convention relative to the sick and wounded of the armed forces should be revised. The Committee further proposed the framing of a detailed Convention defining the status and position of PW in a far more comprehensive form than the Regulations annexed to the Fourth Hague Convention of 1907. In 1929, the plenipotentiaries of the States assembled at Geneva in diplomatic conference and signed the Geneva Convention in its revised form, as well as that called the "1929 Convention relative to the treatment of Prisoners of War" which, during the second World War, was to safeguard millions of men. Arts. 77 and 79 of the 1929 Convention provide for the setting up in a neutral country of a Central Agency of information regarding prisoners of war, the organization of which the ICRC may propose to the Powers concerned.

On the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, the Committee therefore had a basis in law which had been lacking in 1914.

Gravely perturbed by the threat of war which hung over Europe, the ICRC, although pursuing its humanitarian work, for instance in Spain, prepared itself for the great task which

it would have to shoulder if war occurred. The trend in Europe led the Committee to think that war would, indeed, break out suddenly in countries adjoining Switzerland, and that it would rapidly spread. It might therefore become necessary for the Committee to set up, within a very short time, administrative machinery on a scale to match events of such magnitude, and the staff would have to be increased almost at once from a mere handful to several hundred workers, at a time when national defence would be a major problem and when most Swiss citizens would be mobilized in the army.

In May 1938, the ICRC set to work. On September 15, 1938, almost a year before hostilities began, it appointed from its members a special commission, called the "Commission for Work in Wartime" (*Commission des Œuvres de Guerre*), whose chief duty was to plan the organization and functions of the Central Agency.

The "Commission for Work in Wartime" held twenty-five meetings before war broke out. It consisted of six members, four of whom had played an active part in the management of the Agency in 1914, and who therefore had considerable experience of the many difficulties inherent in setting up an information agency.

The problems confronting the Central Agency were : (1) to find the necessary workers for the ICRC; (2) to have free premises allowing immediate opening of the Agency in case of war; (3) to draft the notifications informing the Governments concerned of its opening; and (4) to provide a rough outline of its organization and plan of work.

In order to recruit the requisite personnel in Switzerland, a provisional list was drawn up in 1939 of former workers in the Agency of 1914, who might be asked to co-operate.

By May, out of 50 people who were invited, 31 had agreed to join. Steps were then taken to engage people who had not worked in the 1914 Agency.

Negotiations were undertaken with the Genevese authorities in order to find available premises; on September 2, 1939, the ICRC was granted the use of the "Palais du Conseil Général", where Agency Headquarters were to be throughout the war and post-war period.

The plan of the future Agency was sketched out. Five Sections were provided for : Management, Registry, Office and Accommodation, Visitors' Reception, and Finance Sections. The heads of these various sections were appointed, and M. J. Chenevière, a member of the ICRC, was asked to take over the management of the new Agency.

The Commission for Work in Wartime drafted cables and letters notifying belligerent States of the opening in Geneva of the Central PW Agency, and circular letters for the other States signatory to the Geneva Convention, as well as to all National Red Cross Societies, to which the ICRC might appeal for help in its work.

From the outbreak of war, the Committee was thus in a position to offer the belligerent Powers the services of the Central Prisoners of War Agency. On September 14, it was officially opened, and the notifications despatched to the Governments and National Red Cross Societies of the countries at war.

Arrangements in the "Palais du Conseil Général" were improvised. The furniture consisted only of chairs and of planks laid on trestles. Letters, already in large numbers, piled up in cardboard boxes. Some fifty persons, most of them voluntary workers, began with their sorting and classification. Meanwhile, carpenters were putting up partitions in the main body of the building : a huge hall built for public meetings had to be divided into offices. It seemed as if the size of this hall, the gallery and annexes, covering 4,700 square metres, should be adequate for all the Agency's needs, since in 1914 an area of 1,100 square metres in the "Musée Rath" had been almost enough.

However, the spreading of the war expanded the activities of the ICRC to a degree it had been impossible to foresee. Thus, this great hall, which could accommodate over five hundred workers, nevertheless soon proved too small, not only to hold all the departments of the Committee, but even to cover the needs of the Central Agency alone. Though its headquarters were maintained in the "Palais", it was obliged to occupy successively the "Musée Rath", a bank and several flats in Geneva, representing in all a working area of some 11,000 square metres.

Whereas in 1914-18 the personnel did not exceed 1,200, mainly voluntary workers, by the spring of 1945 it had reached its peak number of 3,921 (1,741 voluntary workers), of whom the Central Agency employed 2,585 (1,676 voluntary workers). The last figure includes 1,400 persons working in about twenty Swiss towns, who gave invaluable help.

The magnitude of the work that lay ahead when the first communications and requests for information reached Geneva, can be gauged by comparing two figures : at the close of the 1914-18 war the International Agency's card-indexes contained seven million cards, whereas the Central Agency had 36 million at the end of June, 1947.

* * *

In the mind of the general public, the Central PW Agency is often identified with the International Committee.

That these two organizations should be thought of as one, and that the Agency is so widely known and appreciated, is easily explained by the fact that it was the first structure to be set up by the ICRC during the second World War, that its personnel was by far the largest in number, that other departments of the Committee, while still in the making¹, were also lodged in the "Palais du Conseil Général" until the spring of 1942, and finally by the countless personal contacts it made throughout the world with PW and their relatives. These circumstances explain the good repute in which the Agency has stood and still stands today.

It will be shown later in this Report how the liaison between the Agency and other departments¹ of the Committee was ensured.

For a true appreciation of the object and service of the Agency, one must keep in mind that the ICRC, in all its parts, was a single and homogeneous body.

¹ These various departments and their activities (PW, Internees and Civilians Division, Relief Division, Divisions for Administration, Delegations Abroad, etc.), are described at the beginning of Vol. I.

PART I

DUTIES, STRUCTURE AND GENERAL METHODS OF WORK

DUTIES OF THE CENTRAL PW AGENCY

The existence and activities of the Central PW Agency are based in law on Arts. 77 and 79 of the Geneva Convention of July 27, 1929 relative to the treatment of PW, as follows:—

Art. 77. — At the commencement of hostilities, each of the belligerent Powers and the neutral Powers who have belligerents in their care, shall institute an official bureau to give information about the prisoners of war in their territory.

Each of the belligerent Powers shall inform its Information Bureau as soon as possible of all captures of prisoners effected by its armed forces, furnishing them with all particulars of identity at its disposal to enable the families concerned to be quickly notified, and stating the official addresses to which families may write to the prisoners.

The Information Bureau shall transmit all such information immediately to the Powers concerned, on the one hand through the intermediary of the protecting Powers, and on the other through the Central Agency contemplated in Article 79.

The Information Bureau, being charged with replying to all enquiries relative to prisoners of war, shall receive from the various services concerned all particulars respecting internments and transfers, releases on parole, repatriations, escapes, stays in hospitals, and deaths, together with all other particulars necessary for establishing and keeping up to date an individual record for each prisoner of war.

The Bureau shall note in this record, as far as possible, and subject to the provisions of Article 5, the regimental number, names and sur-

names, date and place of birth, rank and unit of the prisoner, the surname of the father and name of the mother, the address of the person to be notified in case of accident, wounds, dates and places of capture, of internment, of wounds, of death, together with all other important particulars.

Weekly lists containing all additional particulars capable of facilitating the identification of each prisoner shall be transmitted to the interested Powers.

The individual record of a prisoner of war shall be sent after the conclusion of peace to the Power in whose service he was.

The Information Bureau shall also be required to collect all personal effects, valuables, correspondence, pay-books, identity tokens, etc. which have been left by prisoners of war who have been repatriated or released on parole, or who have escaped or died, and to transmit them to the countries concerned.

Art. 79. — A Central Agency of information regarding prisoners of war shall be established in a neutral country. The International Red Cross Committee shall, if they consider it necessary, propose to the Powers concerned the organization of such an agency.

This agency shall be charged with the duty of collecting all information regarding prisoners which they may be able to obtain through official or private channels, and the agency shall transmit the information as rapidly as possible to the prisoners' own country or the Power in whose service they have been.

These provisions shall not be interpreted as restricting the humanitarian work of the International Red Cross Committee.

Thus Art. 79, in Sections 1 and 2, provides for the formation and duties of the Central Agency; Art. 77, in Section 3, lays down that belligerent Powers shall have recourse to it as an intermediary, concurrently with the Protecting Powers.

The 1929 Convention covers PW only, whilst the position of civilians, in 1939, was governed by no international convention. The ICRC succeeded in obtaining from the Governments that at least such civilians as might be in enemy territory at the outbreak of war, and who were to be interned, should benefit by the 1929 Convention relating to PW. The Agency was thus able to take action in behalf of one class of civilians, that is civilian internees¹, similar to that which it exercised in behalf of PW.

¹ To whom should be added the civilians who were in assigned residence or under police supervision.

The basic duties of the Agency may be defined as follows :—

- (1) To centralize all information on PW and civilian internees (announcement of capture, deaths, transfers, etc.).
- (2) To act as intermediary between the belligerent Powers for the transmission of this information.
- (3) To serve as an information bureau and on the basis of the data assembled in its card-indexes or of researches made, to answer enquiries from public or private organizations and private persons.

This last function was the outcome of the first : the Agency kept a record on cards of all information it received, which enabled it to reply to queries about individual cases.

The definition given above of the duties of the Agency is not restrictive. The authors of the Convention, wishing to stress the spirit in which they had defined these duties, laid down explicitly that the provisions of the Convention should not be interpreted as restricting the humanitarian work of the ICRC.

The Agency was thus in a position, whenever asked, to act as intermediary between the belligerents for the forwarding of mail, messages, photographs, official and business documents, as well as the transmission of personal belongings which had been found on the battle-field, or on members of the forces killed in action or who had died in captivity.

The Agency was also concerned with civilians in occupied countries, who were deprived of any effective means of legal protection and were subject to the arbitrary decisions of the occupying Power and, in many cases, had to undergo the most severe measures of detention. The Agency made every endeavour to help them in the same way as PW, but was not able to achieve this to anything like the extent it wished.

Civilians who were at liberty were able to communicate with each other, even though separated by the war, by means of the Civilian Message Scheme set up by the ICRC in the autumn of 1939.

In short, wherever a zone of operations made direct liaison impossible, the Central Agency, so far as it was able, took steps to ensure communications. It should be pointed out that,

in general, the Agency looked after individual cases of combatants or civilians in enemy hands (or presumed to be so), whereas general questions relating to the status and treatment of these persons, as well as relief in kind for them, came within the competency of other departments of the ICRC.

Art. 77 of the Convention provides that the Protecting Powers shall act as intermediary for the forwarding of information on PW to the Powers concerned, concurrently with the transmission carried out by the Central Agency. In point of fact, the Protecting Powers (during the period in which they were acting), received from the belligerents copies of the lists of particulars sent to the Agency, and transmitted them to the opposing side, without, however, acting as an information centre. In the event of the belligerents not recognising a Protecting Power, it devolved on the Agency alone to forward lists.

Whilst remaining strictly within the framework of activities allotted to it, the Agency constantly had to plan undertakings and improvise new methods in order to carry out its tasks in the best conditions. The Central Agency is, indeed, a wartime institution : its management therefore has to bear in mind the fact that its work will be constantly hampered or delayed by the conditions of war.

In the sphere of relief, as in that of military operations, no achievements are final. Unforeseen circumstances may, at any moment, profoundly change the conditions in which the Agency works, and compel it to seek fresh solutions. It then becomes the task of the Agency, as it is of the ICRC, to anticipate events or adapt itself to them without delay. The Agency is appointed by the Convention to act as liaison with the official information bureaux set up in each country. The question arises as to what course it should take when the official bureau in any given country ceases to exist, or becomes unable to carry on its functions in a satisfactory way. In fact, the Agency then must make every endeavour to fill the gap, in order to prevent the terms of the Convention from becoming a dead letter. It is bound to transmit the information in its possession. When, however, normal means of communication are cut by war, the question arises whether this activity should be given up. This, of

course, is out of the question, so that new methods of despatch have to be devised, such as special couriers, express messages, use of the wireless, etc. The Agency also sets on foot collective enquiries (for instance, application to all men belonging to the same military unit), in an effort to trace the men missing after big engagements. Thus, each obstacle, far from leading the Agency to abandon a task, inspires it to find fresh means of achieving its aim.

STRUCTURE OF THE CENTRAL PW AGENCY

The extension of the war meant constant changes in the frame-work of the Agency, which was obliged by its purpose to adapt itself to events which could not be foreseen. There is no space in this Report to give a complete picture of its structure throughout during its constant evolution. It has, therefore, been necessary to confine comments in the Report to permanent features, and to describe its activity at the peak period, during the last years of the War. In these pages, the reader should not lose sight of the fact that the Agency was not static, but a living organism which could only survive by change, and at the price of constant vigilance, innovations and sometimes fruitless experiments.

The Central Agency, which was under the authority of the Agency Commission, was made up of Sections, each under its own director. At the head was a co-ordinating and supervisory body, the Management.

The various component sections of the Agency may be divided in three groups, according to their functions: General or Technical Sections, working for the Agency as a whole; National Sections, covering all persons of the same nationality; and Special Sections, who looked after certain classes of war victims, regardless of their nationality.

(i). THE AGENCY COMMISSION

This Commission consisted of three members of the ICRC who had taken an active part in the management of the 1914-18 International Agency, and of the members of the Management. One of the Committee members acted as chairman. The

Commission was the essential liaison between the Bureau of the ICRC and the Agency, and its task was to direct the work of the latter and to supervise its satisfactory operation.

The general lines on which the current work of the ICRC was proceeding were communicated to the Management at the meetings, which took place once or twice monthly. Important questions concerning the Agency were discussed by the Commission itself on the basis of reports tabled by members of the Management. When questions were outside the competence of the Commission, they were forwarded, with its considered opinion, to the Bureau of the ICRC.

(2). THE MANAGEMENT

The structure and powers of the Management greatly expanded between 1939 and 1945. At the beginning of the war, it consisted of one or two members, but from 1943 onwards, it gradually embraced a number of heads of sections. The duties of the members were defined, and one of them was appointed as chief.

The Management settled questions relating to working methods, the number of personnel, premises and supplies. Meetings were held several times a week for general discussion of important problems, and to enable members to exchange information in their respective fields of work: thus all were familiar with the essential features of current problems. If any questions lay outside its province, the Management passed it on to the Commission.

Besides these general tasks, the Management was responsible for others of a specific kind. One was of particular importance: the supervision of General Sections dealing with matters of a technical kind, for which there was no single responsible head, but which were however essential, for instance, PW lists, photostats, typing and preliminary classification. The Management signed the letters for these Sections.

The Management, which included a secretariat with manifold duties, was completed by an Advisory Group. This was concerned with the study and carrying out of plans, and always

included at least three members. During the war years, the group applied itself to careful study and research, in order to improve and standardize working methods ; it drafted technical notes advocating methods which had proved entirely satisfactory in certain Sections¹. The use of standard forms especially was made general, and in the course of time proved indispensable for rapid and economic handling of numerous similar cases. The Advisory Group further issued these standards forms to the various Sections and to the Committee's Delegations abroad. Finally, and above all since the end of the war, members of this Group were entrusted by the Management with the organization of new tasks within or outside the work of the Sections. They set up, for instance, for the German Section, working units amongst German internees in Switzerland and German PW in France. They also organized, after the war, the despatch of German PW mail to their relatives, through the good offices of the ICRC.

The Statistics Section was attached direct to the Management. This Section had a staff of two or three persons, and drew up, on the basis of particulars supplied by the Sections, monthly schedules on the work of the ICRC.

As regards the Agency, statistics were prepared of the card-indexes, incoming and outgoing mail, enquiries, personnel and other branches.

The card-index statistics showed the number of cards and the number of cases in the indexes of the Agency. They also gave

¹ For the purpose of these notes the work of National Sections was sub-divided in twelve categories :

- (1) Sorting of correspondence.
- (2) Despatch and filing of correspondence.
- (3) Card-index (formation, instruction, checking, statistics).
- (4) Card-index (team leaders, filing).
- (5) Checking.
- (6) Transmission of messages.
- (7) Dealing with information, enquiries, tallies.
- (8) Initiation and follow-up of enquiries, communications to enquirers.
- (9) Deaths.
- (10) Regimental enquiries.
- (11) Telegrams.
- (12) Civilians.

the number of "tallies", that is to say when enquiry cards tallied with information cards.

The statistics for enquiries showed the number of enquiries opened, or completed, and the number of those which had provided new particulars.

Personnel statistics gave, in particular, the distribution by Sections of the total number of working days for the Agency staff.

These schedules proved extremely useful to the Management and heads of Sections. They gave them an exact idea of the progress the work was making, and supplied a useful means of comparison for determining the Agency's requirements in personnel.

Finally, these statistical summaries represent an indispensable source of information for the ICRC, since they give in figures a survey of the immense task carried out by the Committee.

Regular meetings to exchange information, usually held weekly, brought together alternately the representatives of all the Sections, and those dealing more especially with civilian problems. In the course of these meetings, which were open to representatives of other departments of the ICRC and occasionally to delegates abroad passing through Geneva, those present gave an account of the work of their Sections, and the Management supplied the necessary information. The meetings were often made more useful by detailed statements from heads of Sections, of the tasks of a particular Section, and by accounts of missions abroad, etc.

(3). GENERAL SECTIONS

The General Sections, whose activities were solely technical, were responsible to the Management direct. Their work will be examined in detail in the chapter on the Agency's methods of work in general.

(4). NATIONAL SECTIONS

The National Sections, concerned with PW, civilian internees and civilians who were nationals of one State, were the central core of the Agency. They were subdivided into Services, the number and nature of which corresponded to the requirements of each particular Section. They were based on the nationality of war victims, as defined by the frontiers in 1939, at the outbreak of war. This division of work by nationality had already been adopted in part by the International Agency of 1914-1918.

At the beginning of the Agency's work, cases concerning civilians, whether interned or not, were dealt with according to each nationality by different Sections. Later on, these Sections were merged with the corresponding "military" Sections and became, as far as the main Sections were concerned, merely part of the National Section. Each National Section thenceforth became a homogeneous service dealing with all cases relating to the same nationality, with the exception however of certain classes of persons that called for the setting up of Special Sections. The latter remained, however, in close touch with the National Sections, and transmitted to them reference cards concerning the nationals with whom they were dealing. Thus, National Sections had in their card-index, sometimes of course merely in the form of a reference, all information and all enquiries concerning persons of the same nationality.

Each National Section comprised : (a) a card-index containing in the alphabetical order of names, all data and all enquiries received by the Agency; (b) a secretariat dealing with the correspondence, usually including a checking subsection, and (c) a service having charge of the forwarding of PW mail in transit.

The National Sections were set up as and when the various countries were drawn into the conflict. It even proved necessary to set up services for nationals of some neutral countries who were PW, internees or refugees in belligerent countries. Thus there was scarcely a country, however small, for which at some stage a national Section was not opened. For practical reasons, small Sections were often grouped together under one responsible head.

The criterion of nationality always provided the most reasonable solution of most of the many problems which arose when national Sections were set up. Such problems were a result of political and military upheavals, e.g. annexations, occupations of territory, cutting up of countries by fighting zones or demarcation lines, constitution of new States, or exile of governments. We may quote the cases of Poland, which was partitioned by the occupation of German and Soviet forces ; of France, where there was an occupied and an unoccupied zone, whilst a Free Government and free armed forces were formed outside the country ; of Yugoslavia, where two new States were created (Croatia and Serbia), and where the rest of the country was occupied by Germany and Italy, whilst an independent government was formed abroad ; of Italy, divided by the fighting zone in two parts under the authority of rival governments. Finally, it may be recalled that in many national fighting forces there were a number of nationals of countries occupied by the Axis.

It might appear logical to cover all war victims belonging to a single class in one Section, independently of their nationality. A certain number of particular Sections were set up on these lines during the first years of the Agency's existence. This system, as will now be explained, had however a number of disadvantages of a technical kind, and was later given up.

The working methods of these National Sections and the part they played will be explained in the following chapters of Part I. Part II will be devoted to the special characteristics and development of each.

(5). SPECIAL SECTIONS

In the Special Sections, the exceptional situation of persons within a category was used as the basis of classification, instead of nationality. There were five Special Sections : the *Medical Personnel*, covering individual members of the army medical services and persons of equivalent status ; the *Sundry Civilian Internees* (CID) ; *Immigration to Palestine* (IMPA), covering

special cases of Jewish persons ; the *Section for Internment in Switzerland*, and the *Section for Dispersed Families*.

The need for the Medical Personnel Section was obvious ; the Geneva Convention relating to the sick and wounded places the Army Medical Service in a separate class, for which specific problems arise.

The CID and the IMPA Sections were set up to deal with the difficulties encountered in applying the test of nationality in the classification of individual cases. CID and IMPA had to deal with persons whose nationality was not always clearly defined, or who had lost it as a result of annexation, or of racial or political persecution. The two last Sections (Internment and Dispersed Families) were set up because it seemed convenient to deal in one section with problems relating to persons having common status or circumstances.

The existence of the Special Sections parallel with National Sections had many disadvantages. There was the risk of the same case being dealt with in part by two Sections. It was therefore necessary to make out reference cards or complete copies for the National Sections, and this involved loss of time and congestion of the card-indexes. It proved extremely difficult when card-indexing, to file surnames belonging to different languages. and this obstacle could be overcome only by setting up several card-indexes within the same Section. It was also no easy task to secure a sufficient number of personnel who were familiar with all the languages employed.

These drawbacks increased as time went on, until it was decided to do away with the Special Sections and to give their work to the National Sections. One exception was, however, made for the IMPA Section, which continued its work as before.

Finally, there were two Sections of a different kind, but which may nevertheless be grouped with the Special Sections : the *Civilian Messages* and the *Personal Effects*. These Sections were not based on classes of persons, but on particular tasks.

The work of the five Sections mentioned above will be treated in detail in Part II, that of the Civilian Messages and Personal Effects in Part I, in the chapter relating to working methods.

* * *

NOMENCLATURE OF SECTIONS AT THE CENTRAL AGENCY

This classification includes those Sections that were permanent, but does not include those which were temporarily set up as a result of passing necessities.

General Sections.

Lists
Photostats
Typing
Preliminary Filing and Evening Work
Auxiliary Sections
Outside Work
Reception of Visitors
Watson Machines
Statistics

<i>National Sections</i>	<i>Date of Opening</i>
Polish	1939
French	—
British	—
German	—
Spanish	—
Portuguese	—
Central and South American	—
Scandinavian	1940
Belgian	—
Luxemburg	—
Dutch	—
French Colonial	—
Italian	—

Greek	—
Yugoslav	1941
Russian	—
Czechoslovak	—
American	—
Japanese	1942
Hungarian	1943
Rumanian	—
Bulgarian	—
Finnish	—
Baltic States	—
Sundry ¹	—
Austrian	1945

Special Sections.

Medical Personnel
 Civilian Message
 Sundry Civilian Internees (CID)
 Immigration to Palestine (IMPA)
 Internment in Switzerland
 Dispersed Families
 Personal Effects

* * *

Co-operation between the Central Agency and the Bureau of the ICRC was achieved, as already mentioned, by the Agency Commission, which periodically brought together members of the ICRC and members of the Agency Management. This association became even closer from the fact that several members of the ICRC took an active part in certain Sections, or directed them (Medical Personnel, Internment). Moreover, the Agency staff had the opportunity of meeting the members

¹ Nationalities not covered by separate Sections : Iran, Switzerland, Turkey, Stateless holding Nansen passports, and so on.

or principal assistants of the ICRC during informal talks arranged periodically, on subjects which had a bearing on the Committee's activities.'

Co-operation with the Secretariat of the ICRC and later with the Division for Prisoners, Internees and Civilians (PIC), was also maintained with the greatest care. The Secretariat, and later on this Division dealt with the general problems concerning those classes, of which the Agency covered the individual cases. It was therefore necessary that the work of the two should be in complete harmony. To this end, a head of the Agency was present at the weekly meetings of the PIC Division, and a head of this Division was present at the Agency Commission's meetings. Finally, members of the PIC Division, whose work covered a specific geographical sector, remained in contact with the heads of the National Section covering the same sector.

Other departments of the ICRC also dealt with individual cases. Thus, the Finance Department forwarded monetary relief to private persons, and the Relief Department transmitted individual parcels and books. The National Sections of the Agency were of course informed of these activities, and from the outset a two-way flow of information took place between the National Sections and those Departments.

Moreover, the Delegations in various countries abroad devoted a great part of their time to individual cases, concerning which they were in close touch with the National Sections of the Agency. One of the members of the Management Agency took part regularly in the meetings of the Delegations Commission.

These forms of direct contact were further supplemented by a Section for internal information, the Liaison Service, which, in particular, went through the mail register and passed on to the Agency Sections copies of letters concerning them, but which they did not deal with themselves.

GENERAL METHODS OF WORK

In its main lines, the Central Agency of 1939 was based on methods which had proved their value in the International Agency of 1914-1918, but certain mechanical aids to efficiency had meanwhile developed, and these were put into use. Faithfulness to the original document was a principle from which there was no deviation. The lists of PW sent by the Detaining Powers remained the basic documents ; they were dated and provided with reference numbers. Instead of typescript copies, as sent in 1914-18, the checking of which wasted much time, photostats were now established and forwarded to the official bureaux.

The lists and other documents received in Geneva were methodically scrutinized and every name was recorded on a card. The filling up of information cards was, however, materially altered. In 1914, and in the early months of the 1939 Agency, certain essential indications were purposely omitted from the card and the researcher therefore always had to refer to the original list. The card-index thus had only the value of a reference catalogue. From 1940 onwards, however, all essential indications were recorded on the card. Another important innovation was the direct insertion in the card-index of original documents, such as capture cards written by the PW themselves, or enquiry cards filled in by relatives. The card was therefore no longer merely a guide referring to the source of information, but itself contained first-hand information. In 1939, as in 1941, the meeting or juxtaposition in alphabetical order of information card and enquiry card enabled "tallies" to be made, and information on the person sought to be sent to the applicant.

The method of making enquiries was almost the same as that used twenty-five years before. In particular, the systematic questioning of PW as to members of the same units reported missing, which had produced striking results in 1914-18, was once more resumed. Owing to the use of statistical machines of the International Business Machines Corporation, it was possible to give these enquiries a far wider scope and to make them much more fruitful.

The constantly increasing difficulties of communication led to the use of express messages and telegrams. The Agency even had to resort to broadcasting, to ensure the transmission of information and news.

I. MAIL AND TELEGRAMS

(i). *Receipt and Sorting*

The *Mail Sorting Service* and the *Telegraph Service* were responsible for the receipt of incoming mail and telegrams, and distributed them to the various departments of the ICRC. These two Sections were therefore responsible to a great extent for the smooth working of the whole organization.

Since the greater part of the letters and telegrams received by the ICRC were intended for the Central Agency, the working methods of the Mail Sorting and Telegraph Services will be described in this chapter.

(A). *Mail.*

There were two successive phases of sorting : (a) according to external indications ; (b) according to contents.

(a) *Sorting according to External Indications.* — The aim of this summary selection was to extract from the bulk of the mail everything that could be handed immediately to the Sections concerned. This referred chiefly to mail in transit to be forwarded by the Committee : personal mail of PW, civilian messages, and documents which, like capture cards, could be distributed without further examination to the Sections intended.

(b) *Sorting according to Contents.* — All other mail was sorted according to contents. This more thorough sorting entailed the reading and numbering of letters. Mail items were divided into a dozen categories. Three of these were given a special scrutiny,

which was preferably in charge of one person, owing to the complexity and importance of these papers : (1) general communications from Governments and National Red Cross Societies ; (2) mail from delegates abroad, which was specially entered on index-cards ; and (3) so-called " composite " items, which consisted of several documents and annexes, often mixed up by the censorship, which made careful checking necessary.

Letters concerning several Sections were handed to the Copying (Transfers and Extracts) Service, who made the requisite abstracts or, if necessary, circulated the letters. In this case, the various Sections added a brief note to each document, showing how they had dealt with it.

In each Section of the Agency, one person was especially charged with examining the mail reaching the Section and distributing it to the services concerned. This work was often done by the heads of Sections, who could thus obtain a comprehensive idea of the work of their department.

(B). *Telegrams.*

The Telegraph Service dated and entered in the Registry all telegrams, and had additional copies made, if they concerned several Sections.

On reaching the responsible departments, telegrams were entered in a record showing the date of despatch and arrival, their origin and the number given by the sender, the Section's reference number, and sometimes a precis of contents, after which they were handed to the Sections concerned.

(2). *Despatch*

A. *Mail.*

Letters for despatch were handed by the various Sections to the *Mail Despatch Service*, which had them forwarded. An exception was made, however, in the case of ordinary mail for the Delegations abroad, which was handed to the Service for collective despatch to Delegations. A further exception

was made in the case of mail sent by special bag, which was handled by the Special Mail Service.

The Central Agency, in virtue of the Conventions in force, enjoyed postal franchise for all incoming and outgoing mail, except for that which concerned civilians at liberty (e.g. civilian messages). One of the important tasks of the Mail Despatch Service was to ensure contact of the ICRC with the Swiss Postal Administration and the World Postal Union, and to work out with them the most suitable mail routes.

The Committee's mail was forwarded, according to its urgency and the state of communications, by overland or air mail, by cable or by special bag, reserved for the Committee's correspondence. Permission in the last case was obtained from the postal administration in certain countries, to overcome difficulties of communication ¹.

(B). *Telegrams.*

The *Telegraph Service* had charge of the despatch and receipt of telegrams. It had three sub-sections : Arrival, Despatch and Accounts.

The ICRC did not have the benefit of franchise for telegrams, as it did for postal services, and was obliged to come to an agreement with the authorities and the telegraph service of the countries concerned on a method of settling the charges. These were borne, as a rule, by the organization or person most directly concerned in the transmission by cable of information or messages. The ICRC assumed the often very heavy charges for telegrams dealing with general questions, as it did for all those sent on its own initiative. Although in principle telegrams were not sent concerning individual cases, unless the person concerned could guarantee payment, the ICRC on many occasions paid the charges when the addressees for any reason were unable to do so.

All telegrams despatched bore, at the end of the message, the reference " Intercroixrouge ", followed by a letter and the

¹ A similar form of bag was long in existence between Geneva and Cairo via Austria, the Balkans and Ankara.

individual reference number of the Section ; these served as a reference for the reply.

A few figures will give some idea of the extent of the mail and telegrams received and sent by the ICRC. As from September 1, 1939 to June 30, 1947, mail items received numbered 59,511,000 and these despatched 61,158,000. During the same period 347,982 telegrams were received and 219,169 despatched. Some of these cables ran to several thousand words.

II. TRANSMISSION OF INFORMATION TO OFFICIAL INFORMATION BUREAUX

The terms of the 1929 Convention charge the Central Agency with the transmission of information regarding prisoners as speedily as possible to the men's home country. To do this, it was necessary to standardize the registration and transmission of documents. At the 1939 Agency, the receipt, registration and transmission of information were carried out by the *Lists Section* or by the National Sections, as the case might be. As a rule, all documents providing the Agency with information were registered, given a reference number, and a photostat was made of them. The Agency kept the original and sent the photostat to the official Information Bureau of the Power concerned.

A short description follows of the classification and filing system in use¹. This was based on the source and the nature of the document and the chronological order of its receipt. Each page was given an assigning mark, comprising a reference and a number. The reference was an abridged indication of the kind of document (for example, EB meant Enquiry about a British prisoner). These assigning marks allowed the filing of documents in the Registry. They were also inscribed on the corresponding cards, which allowed easy and rapid reference to the original documents. This was done in case of doubt as to the proper reading of a card, as also for all cases of deaths.

Information received by the Agency was divided in two categories : official and unofficial.

¹ It may be observed that the so-called decimal system, often used in large-scale administrative systems, and which has certain advantages, might also have been used at the Agency for the filing of documents.

(I). *Transmission of Official Information*

"Official" information included the data supplied by the official Information Bureaux (as provided for by Art. 77 of the 1929 Convention) and by certain other government authorities. This information might be in any of the following forms : telegrams, ordinary or microfilm lists, identity cards, death certificates or ordinary letters. Of these official documents, the lists, identity cards and death certificates were received by the Lists Section, whereas telegrams and ordinary letters were dealt with by the National Sections.

(A). *Transmission by the Lists Section.*

In order to carry out the mandate conferred by the 1929 Convention, the Agency instructed a special Lists Section to forward the official lists which included the identity cards and death certificates.

Official lists, owing to their authenticity, were the chief basic documents on which the Agency worked. They consisted of rolls giving information of capture, deaths, transfers and repatriations. They were received in every kind of form, sometimes manuscript, sometimes typescript, as no specific form is laid down in the Convention. This diversity had many technical disadvantages. As a rule, they gave the following data :— Surname and first name of members of the forces, date of birth, nationality, army number, PW number, address of next of kin and state of health. These lists bore the heading of the official camp address. It should be mentioned here that most belligerents declined to give the geographical location of camp sites.

As mentioned above, the Lists Section dealt with all official papers, such as microfilm lists, identity cards and death certificates, in the same way as with ordinary lists.

In June 1944 the American Official Bureau sent the first microfilm lists to the Agency ; each reel contained about a hundred negatives, each carrying as a rule particulars of fifteen

men. These microfilms were printed and enlarged by the Photostat Service by means of an automatic enlarger.

It is an interesting fact that the Agency, during the last months of the war, had also begun to transmit information by means of 35 mm. microfilms to the British and American official Information Bureaux.

The identity cards, which were sent by various Detaining Powers, such as Great Britain and France, were individual cards usually filled in by the PW themselves and supplying greater detail than the lists. Of all types of documents received from official Bureaux, these proved the most suitable for transmitting information.

There were various categories of documents certifying the death of a PW, and the Agency received a great number of these ; they included :—

(1) Official copies of death certificates, equivalent to the original document. These were rarely sent to the Agency.

(2) Various documents drawn up by the official Information Bureaux of captor States ; they generally bore the signatures of officers, and often those of doctors or witnesses.

(3) Forms devised by the ICRC and bearing its heading. They were already used during the first World War, but more widely during the recent War. Some official Bureaux made use of them exclusively.

These various types of death certificate were sent to the Agency by official Information Bureaux, National Red Cross Societies and camp commandants.

On their receipt in the Lists Section, the documents were checked, given a reference and registered, and acknowledgment was made to the sender. Each page was provided with references corresponding to the various nationalities mentioned. Registration was carried out on cards, on which were inscribed the reference given to the document, its origin and date, date of receipt, indications regarding photostats made and transmitted.

The documents were then passed to the Photostat Service, and the copies made were sent to the Powers concerned. Two

copies of the covering list were sent with each despatch, one copy being returned as a receipt by the addressees. From 1939 to June 1947, the Lists Section registered 3,565,869 pages of lists and other documents.

The *Photostat Service*, which worked in close co-operation with the Lists Section, reproduced the original documents on sheets of paper of the same size, or slightly smaller. The Section used, on an average, during 1945, 4,000 square metres of paper a month. The apparatus used were two "Triplex" machines, one of which the ICRC had bought as a precaution before the war, and one "Kontophot" lent by the kindness of the Swiss authorities and later purchased by the ICRC. A helio-printer was also used for some time, but was later given up as it did not prove satisfactory. Between 1939 and June 1947, 3,719,814 photostats were carried out for the Agency, of which 2,503,221 were made in the Photostat Service, and 1,216,593 in private workshops.

In 1914-18, it had been a relatively simple matter to transmit information received from captor States to the official Bureaux of the countries of origin of PW. This information was sent chiefly by means of official lists and concerned a small number of countries; it was therefore possible to entrust the receipt and transmission to one central service, the Copy Section. During the second World War, the Agency adopted the same procedure, but the extension of the war gave rise to many difficulties. As mentioned above, the States concerned used several kinds of official documents (lists, microfilms, identity cards and death certificates). Moreover, a great part of the data was sent by telegrams and these, for technical reasons, could not be dealt with by the Lists Section. The heads of the Agency therefore considered from time to time the abolition of the Lists Section and the division of the work on official documents between the various National Sections. It was finally decided not to have recourse to this method, which would have entailed far-reaching reorganization.

During the war, the duties of the Lists Section were widened as shown below, to include the handling of "unofficial" docu-

ments which bore the names of persons belonging to various nationalities.

Replies to enquiries addressed by certain National Societies to official Bureaux also constituted official information ; they were, however, dealt with by the National Sections.

(B). *Telegraphic Transmission by National Sections.*

The general use of telegrams and radiograms for transmitting information on PW was one of the new features of the Agency of 1939.

Whereas the Lists Section forwarded photostats of official documents by post, some National Sections, in order to speed up the arrival in countries overseas of especially important information (announcements of capture or of deaths) telegraphed these data to the official Bureaux.

Official Bureaux of countries at a great distance, or cut off from Geneva by the breakdown of communications, also sent the Agency certain official data by wire. Photostats of these cables were sent to the official Bureau of the opposing side, or the contents were cabled to distant countries. In the first case, transmission was carried out by the Lists Section, and in the second by National Sections.

In most instances, arrangements had been made with the organizations of the countries of origin of PW, as to methods of forwarding information.

(2). *Transmission of Unofficial Information*

All information from sources other than official Bureaux was considered as "unofficial". These sources were public bodies, National Red Cross Societies, delegates of the ICRC abroad, camp commandants, camp leaders, individual prisoners and private persons.

This information usually came by post, but also by wire and in very varied forms : capture cards, lists, notifications of death, unsolicited letters, replies to enquiries, statements by prisoners.

Amongst unofficial documents the notices of capture, called "capture cards", deserve particular mention. This was a document filled in by the PW himself during the first days after his arrival in a permanent camp and addressed to the Agency. This card should not be confused with the card giving notice of capture, which the prisoner, in conformity with Art. 36, Sec. 2 of the 1929 Convention, sent to his next of kin not later than a week after his arrival in camp. The ICRC was responsible for the idea of the "capture card" and for its being brought into general use by the belligerent countries. Although the Convention obliges the signatory Powers to transmit information on PW without delay, experience has shown that conditions due to the war, such as the destruction or limitation of means of transport, the congestion in official bureaux, the priority given to work of national importance, all considerably delayed the forwarding of lists. These circumstances led to the introduction of the "capture card".

At the outbreak of war, the Delegate in Berlin, in view of the slowness in forwarding notifications, suggested to the German authorities that each PW, at the time of sending a capture card to his next of kin, should also send a similar card to the Agency, bearing all requisite indications to identify him. These cards would be placed in the files at Geneva, and there meet and correspond with enquiries made by next of kin, enabling replies to be sent. The German authorities accepted this principle. On March 26, 1940, the first capture card, filled in by a British airman who was a prisoner in Germany, arrived in Geneva. During the summer of the same year, capture cards from French and Belgian prisoners poured in.

A certain space of time had to pass and various hindrances to be met before this system came into general use: questions of reciprocity, in particular, delayed its coming into operation in Great Britain and in Italy. However, the system spread to most of the detaining countries, even if the despatch of this card was not a matter of obligation like that of the card to next of kin. Although capture cards could in no way take the place of official lists or identity cards, they did prove extremely useful. Owing to the privileges given to the ICRC for mail,

as regards routing and censorship, they were forwarded more quickly than cards sent to relatives, especially when postal communications were uncertain. Moreover, as they were written or dictated by the man himself, they enabled the correct spelling of names with more certainty than did the lists. Finally, as PW often filled in capture cards when they were sent to a new camp or to hospital, the Agency was informed without delay of changes of address, and passed them on at once to those concerned, which did away with some part of the delays or errors affecting PW mail. For this reason the Agency, from 1940 onwards, communicated information provided by capture cards direct to French next of kin, and up to the end of the war it telegraphed new data received by means of these cards to the British and American official Bureaux.

These cards were usually issued by the Detaining Powers. Towards the end of the war, however, the ICRC found itself obliged to have them printed in Switzerland and to supply them to countries which could no longer produce them, owing to war conditions.

Amongst unofficial documents received by the Agency, mention should be made, after capture cards, of the lists sent by camp leaders in Germany. Many Sections found in these a main source of information. They were especially useful when official lists were late in arrival.

When an unofficial list concerned men of the same nationality, it was handed to the National Section concerned, who gave it a reference, transferred the information to cards, had a photostat made and sent this to the official Information Bureaux. On the other hand, when a list was "mixed", that is to say when it contained names of men of different nationalities, it was passed to the Lists Section. In this case, too, it was given a reference, and a number of photostats were made corresponding to the nationalities. Each copy was handed to the National Section concerned who dealt with and transmitted it.

As in the case of official documents, some unofficial data were also communicated by telegraph to ensure more speedy delivery.

III. APPLICATIONS AND ENQUIRIES

The Central Agency not only received information, but also a great many applications. Uncertainty of mind of those who are separated from their near relatives is as grievous to bear as physical suffering. The fact of writing to the Red Cross brings some degree of relief, as the applicant has at least the certainty of someone sharing in the search, and to get a reply means that intolerable suspense is brought to an end. Many were without news of the missing, not shown on the official lists, and had no means of knowing if they were prisoners, wounded, sick or dead. The Red Cross was their last resource, and the daily flow of letters to Geneva was proof of their confidence in its powers.

The particulars given by the official Bureaux of the countries concerned were often of a summary kind ; this led to many supplementary applications to be sent by relatives direct to the Central Agency.

In order to meet the situation, the Agency had to adopt a wide and accurate system which could be adjusted to all extensions of the conflict, but was easy to manipulate : this was the Card-Index. By the end of the War, the Index contained 36 million cards ; these represented the continual patient gleanings of all the data and applications which for six years had passed through the Agency. These details were placed on cards which, filed according to nationality and in alphabetical order, represented the indexes of the National Sections. Applications which corresponded to the substance of data already in the Index were answered immediately : if no information was available, and whenever possible, an enquiry was set on foot.

In order not to burden this report, the technical problems raised in forming and operating the National Card-Indexes have been dealt with in a separate chapter¹.

The notes which follow show the nature of applications arriving at the Agency, and the various means adopted for replying to them with accuracy and speed.

(i). *Applications*

(A). *Receipt.*

Applications arrived at the Agency in three forms :

(a) By mail (letters, postcards, application forms).

(b) By wire. The number of telegraphic applications steadily increased, particularly from countries overseas with which the telegraph was the only practical means of communication.

(c) Verbal applications made in person.

Applications arrived at the Agency either direct from private persons or through various organizations, official Information Bureaux, National Red Cross Societies, Relief Societies, etc., often in the form of lists. Methods in this respect varied according to the country.

Applications from France, Italy and Switzerland usually came direct from next of kin. On principle, the Agency acknowledged receipt if an immediate reply was not possible. Notifications of deaths, however, were sent through the competent organizations of the country of origin of the deceased, which undertook the duty of informing the relatives².

In the case of the British Commonwealth, Germany and the United States, it was customary for the National Red Cross

¹ See pp. 94 sqq.

² In special circumstances exceptions had to be made, for instance, in the case of France in 1940-1941, when communicating the result of "Regimental Enquiries" (See page 49). The official and private organizations of that country were so overburdened with work that the ICRC decided, with their approval, to send a preliminary notification of death to relatives, at the same time informing the Official Bureaux concerned.

Societies to assemble the applications addressed to the ICRC (in Germany the practice was due to formal instructions), and to give the replies to the relatives. In such cases, no acknowledgement of the applications, was made to the next of kin.

On the whole, the applications sent direct by relatives steadily decreased during the War, whereas those sent through official Information Bureaux or National Red Cross Societies gradually increased, at least until the end of hostilities. Individual applications from Italy, however, continued to arrive at the Agency until the end, owing no doubt to the administrative difficulties in that country during the last years of the war.

It should be stressed that the ICRC has always attached much importance to direct contact with relatives and other individuals making applications, as one of the best means of ensuring that the services it could offer should become known. This direct contact was also a means of securing greater accuracy and speed in the forwarding of data of the applicants. Moreover, the numerous particulars given by next of kin to the Committee with regard to living conditions and mail of PW allowed it usefully to take steps with the belligerents Powers, and have defects put right.

Quite a number of private organisations collected applications, which they were not in a position to deal with themselves and therefore forwarded to Geneva, thus adding to the work. The ICRC is not in fact bound to reply to all applications; it judges that this obligation only holds good with regard to those received from official organizations or near relatives; however, whenever it considered legitimate, it faithfully performed this additional duty.

It should be recorded that some unscrupulous persons offered to act as intermediaries between individual applicants and the Agency, against payment for their services. Considering that the information service of the Agency was entirely free of charge, these proceedings might have been prejudicial to the ICRC. It was not always easy to prevent such abuses, which could only be detected through the number and variety of the applications made.

Applications received at the Agency were very often inexplicit,

or lacked necessary detail. Correspondents were not always aware of the need or value of the various data of identification, such as nationality. This detail vital was frequently omitted, not only by individual applicants, but sometimes even by an official Bureau, whereas the nationality of the individual sought was the very starting-point of the Agency's search.

Another source of perplexity was the frequent confusion between surnames and first names. Some first names widely used are also in common use as surnames, and were difficult to distinguish, failing due explanation.

The use of the standard card by individual applicants, and of printed forms by public or private offices, prevented this confusion, in so far as the information given was clear and precise.

The essential data normally required for dealing with an application were as follows :—

Surname and first name ¹.

Nationality.

Date and place of birth.

Father's name (for Latin countries in particular).

Religion or racial origin (for civilians).

Rank (for service men) or profession (civilians).

Unit and Army Numbers (for service men). Last known address (civilians).

Date when missing, or date of last news received.

Address of next of kin.

Degree of relationship between applicant and person sought.

Date of application.

The Agency made a point, whenever possible, of acknowledging all applications which could not be answered immediately. Correspondents thus knew that their applications were being

¹ In Latin countries, especially in Italy, married women still use their maiden names, which are placed before their husbands' names, or even used alone. It was therefore necessary to indicate clearly which of the two names was in use and, for compound or hyphenated names, to know which was the principal name.

dealt with, until the Agency was in a position to give a definite reply, sometimes at a much later date. This practise, in spite of the general use of printed acknowledgment cards, (Form 232 for instance), which saved much time and labour, nevertheless caused an appreciable increase of work.

The question arises whether the Central Agency cannot in future dispense with such acknowledgments. In this case, the public in all countries should of course be duly advised, through the press and radio, as well as by a note on the printed application cards.

The third type of application, referred to above, was that made at first hand by persons, some living at long distances, who called at the Agency. For these cases, a special *Reception Service* was set up, where applicants were received by experienced women assistants who were familiar with the Agency's powers of action in this field. After hearing applicants' requests, these assistants went to the National Section concerned for information, which, if found, was handed to the applicant. If no information was forthcoming, the applicants were requested to fill in printed forms which were passed to the National Sections for further search. Any information received was then forwarded to the applicant, except when it involved the news of a death, in which case the notification was made through the national agency concerned.

(B). *Working methods.*

Each application received at the Agency was given a reference and serial number on delivery—thus DF signified “application concerning a French national”—EB signified “application concerning a British national, calling for an enquiry”. Applications were dealt with as follows :

(a) The applications were immediately checked, i.e. the cards concerning the subject of the application were looked up in the Card-Index. This was known as the *Preliminary Check*; any information found there was at once sent to the applicant. If none was found, an acknowledgment was sent, stating that

any data received later by the Agency would be passed on. The application was then transferred to a standard white card, called an Application Card, bearing the same reference as the original application, unless the latter was made out on an enquiry card of the same size, in which case it was filed direct, no transfer being needed. It will be seen below that enquiries were set on foot in numerous cases.

The preliminary checking was carried out by the staff handling the applications, or by clerks in the checking services attached to most of the National Sections.

(b) Applications were filed in the Card-Index at once without the preliminary check. When sent on standard forms or cards of the same size as the index cards, they could be inserted forthwith. For letters, the contents had first to be transcribed to cards. A short acknowledgment was sent to applicants (Form 232) to confirm that application had duly arrived at the Agency. One of two courses could then be followed :

- (i) The application card, when filed in the Index, met with cards giving information, thus producing so-called "tallies" and the information was communicated to the applicant ; or
- (ii) The application card, when filed in the index, failed to meet with cards giving corresponding information. In this case, the card remained in the index until the receipt of particulars produced "tallies" and allowed the applicant to be informed.

The two methods of preliminary checking and of immediate filing in the index were tried and adopted according to circumstances and the needs of the Sections. Preliminary checking was made use of when applications were at first sight especially urgent, for extremely intricate cases, or when a pressing request for search was made. Applications by telegraph always led to preliminary checking. Small Sections, which did not receive a heavy mail, but where cases were often intricate, also practised

this method. Moreover, it proved very suitable in cases concerning civilians.

The immediate placing in the Index was particularly suited to large Sections, where great quantities of mail were received and many applications for the same persons. For applications *en masse* preliminary checking was not possible. Although the method of immediate filing in the Index gained much time, it was less strictly accurate than that of preliminary checking, as it involved the work and varying abilities of a greater number of staff, and consequently a greater liability to error.

The Agency replied to individual applicants by letter, or preferably by standard forms. Great caution was observed in giving information, and if all factors in identifying the individual did not correspond in detail, reservations were made, and applicants advised to approach their national Bureaux.

Sometimes the Agency had to refrain from giving relatives information which might have done them harm, for instance, in the case where the person sought had enlisted in certain armed forces, whereas his relatives were living in territory occupied by the enemy of these forces.

(2). *Enquiries.*

(A). *Nature and general purpose.*

Both in 1914 and in 1939, the institution of enquiries represented one of the principal activities of the Agency. The latter did not confine itself to awaiting the conjunction of applications and information in the Index. While this method was adequate in simple cases, it could not be applied for more intricate applications or those which were of extreme urgency. In such cases, instead of waiting for "tallies" in the Index before informing the applicants, the Agency went ahead in seeking data from other sources.

An enquiry was therefore opened, on the request of applicants (individuals, prisoners of war, private or public bodies) when the data available did not permit a reply, and whenever enquiry seemed justified.

In addition to these enquiries by request, the Agency also itself instituted collective or individual enquiries for missing army personnel, or to obtain supplementary information concerning PW.

The principal circumstances determining the opening of enquiries were as follows :

(1) Military personnel reported missing, or the total absence of news from PW or internees.

(2) Anxiety of relatives regarding the state of health of PW or internees, and frequent requests for them to be medically examined (these cases were handled by the Medical Section).

(3) Requests for details concerning the deaths of PW, (cause of death, last hours of the deceased, spiritual aid given, place of burial, personal effects).

(4) Requests by relatives for evidence from men in the same unit (circumstances attending disappearance, etc.).

(5) Frequent need to complete data in the records of national Sections by securing from official Bureaux or camps supplementary details, or corrections to data received (army numbers, etc.).

(6) Anxiety of PW who were without news from relatives, and who worried about questions of every kind.

(7) Anxiety of relatives on behalf of PW who, long after the end of the war, had still not returned home.

For all these long and laborious enquiries, the National Sections applied to the most varied sources. Any public or private organization, or individuals likely to give useful information, were questioned—official Bureaux, institutions, municipal authorities, National Red Cross Societies, delegates abroad of the ICRC, camp leaders and camp commandants, chaplains and doctors, PW in camp, repatriated or shipwrecked PW, refugees, and so forth.

These enquiries were often of a delicate or difficult nature, and those responsible had to exercise judgment and discrimination. They knew that the result of their steps depended upon their

initiative and perseverance in constant checking and questioning, in the sifting of data and comparing of evidence, and in drawing conclusions from slight details. They had to have a thorough knowledge of the languages used ; they had to be familiar with the general working methods of the Agency and of each National Section, and to be aware of the many characteristics of the countries with which they were dealing, not only as regards PW and their relatives, but also the public and private bodies. With these provisions, they were allowed a great degree of independence in their work, and the heightened interest they brought to it contributed to its efficiency. It remained understood that doubtful cases should always be submitted to the head of the Section for advice.

There was no fixed method for handling enquiries, as each National Section encountered problems which had to be solved according to circumstance. An outline may be given, however, of the general rules which were common to all Sections.

The particulars of the successive stages of an application, the subsequent enquiry and the details obtained were concisely, but fully entered on the application card (date of application, date of receipt, date of opening the enquiry, its nature, positive or negative results, date of reply, particulars of the applicant, and of the individual or bodies asked for information). It was thus possible to see at a glance, at any moment, how the enquiry was proceeding, without getting out the records. In addition to keeping application cards up to date, most of the Sections entered the positive replies on information cards : this was the rule when the reply gave the notification of a death.

In order to carry on enquiries more easily, and to take the necessary "follow-up" action, the national Sections set up small "follow-up" indexes, in which current enquiries were filed in chronological order.

Printed forms, which had considerably simplified the handling of applications, were also used for enquiries sent out, and led to more speedy and accurate results.

(B). *Various categories of enquiry: corresponding organization in Sections.*

Enquiries opened by the Agency were either individual, grouped or collective, according to the case.

"Individual" enquiries were made in clearly determined cases, arising from various causes.

"Grouped" enquiries concerned persons in similar circumstances, and were generally made as a result of collective or "group" applications. Thus, group enquiries were set on foot in the case of air crews shot down or missing, and in that of crews of vessels that had been sunk. These applications came from the country of origin of the missing men and were addressed to the official Bureaux of the captor States.

The name "collective" enquiry was given to a "group" enquiry when it was warranted by its extent and the great number of persons involved. This applied to the search for evidence, usually called "regimental" enquiry.

The enquiries were the responsibility of the correspondence services of the National Sections. No standard procedure could be laid down for the Agency as a whole. The problems which arose were so varied, and changed so frequently during the war that each National Section organized its own correspondence service independently. An outline follows of the general principles in use:

The allocation of correspondence and enquiries, and the organization of efficient services were made on three bases of classification: (1) the geographical factor, (2) the category of the individual or of the cases concerned, (3) the origin of the application.

(1) In the first instance, one service could deal with all correspondence which had the same geographical factor in common, e.g. one language, or one theatre of war. Thus, the French Section included services for North Africa and Indochina, and the British Section for Germany and the Far East. (The last-named dealt with all cases connected with the war in the Far East, whether military personnel or civilians).

(2) In the second instance, all cases of individuals who had a common status or came under one category, were grouped together, for instance, services for Civilians and Deaths, which were common to most of the Sections ; Prisoners, and Workers and Deportees in the French Section ; Seamen and Airmen in the British Section.

(3) In the third instance, one service handled all applications from the same source : this system was applied by the German Section in its early days, for applications sent in by the OKW (German High Command) and the German Red Cross.

One or several of the three bases of classification could be applied, according to circumstances or the requirements of the Section.

(C). Enquiries concerning deaths. Services for Deaths.

The Agency was at all times especially concerned with information about men who had fallen in action and had been buried by the enemy, or who had died in captivity. Enquiries on this subject formed a considerable part of the activities of the National Sections, and it was found necessary to set up a Service for Deaths in each.

The difficulty of the task of these Services will be realized, if one considers the deep importance attached by relatives to all the circumstances attending a death, especially the following points : certainty as to identity ; the cause of death; attendant details, such as the last hours, spiritual aid given, funeral ceremony, military honours observed, photographs of the funeral ceremony and the grave, locality and care of the grave, personal belongings, etc.

The most difficult enquiries were those concerning men killed in action, or who had died in field hospitals. Information in regard to PW, on the other hand, was more easily secured ; in most cases, their names were already recorded in the National Sections, and deaths usually occurred in the presence of witnesses.

(D). *Enquiries "by evidence" or "Regimental Enquiries".*

Another type of enquiry, adopted by the Agency of 1939 as a main feature, and which had already furnished good results in 1914-1918, was the "Regimental Enquiry". This consisted of the systematic questioning of PW to obtain information on missing men of the same unit.

The term Enquiries "by evidence" would perhaps be more fitting for this type of investigation : the name "Regimental Enquiries" was however adopted at the outset, whether the enquiry was based on the regimental unit or not.

This type of enquiry was introduced by the ICRC after the Battle of France. It will be realized how wide a field had to be covered if the events of May and June 1940 are recalled. Army Groups disorganized within a few weeks ; nearly two million men taken prisoner ; the civil population scattered by the flood of troops on the march ; the interests of individuals reduced to negation by the exigencies of total warfare ; and everywhere along the lines of improvised defence, the dead left lying where they fell.

The Central Agency was overwhelmed by a daily influx of letters of application and official lists ; every effort was made to answer applicants from the information on hand and by the usual means available to the Agency. In the French Section, however, when every name had been filed and all "tallies" had been registered, there still remained 40,000 names for which no information was forthcoming.

Thus, a whole year after these events, there were still 40,000 men missing, from whom their next of kin had received no news and whose names did not appear on the official PW lists sent in by the German military authorities. The Agency adapted its means to the task facing it. Since no results had been got through routine methods, it was decided to attempt to trace the missing men by applying to the French PW who had been in the same units, for evidence at first hand.

Complete lists of the French personnel posted as missing had first to be drawn up. By means of the press and wireless, the

ICRC called upon all French families who were without news of missing men to notify the Central Agency. All information received was placed on index cards by the Watson Machines Section¹. The following details were noted: surname and usual Christian name, date of birth, rank and unit (regiment, company, platoon, etc.). When the cards had been sorted, lists were made of the missing in each unit. From the capture cards received from Germany, the French PW were listed according to units by means of the Watson Machines. Once these two series of lists were established, which included the names of 570,000 PW, a systematic questioning of prisoners could be set on foot, for information regarding missing members of the same unit. A circular letter was sent to each man, enclosing a list of all men missing in his unit, and a printed form for the reply.

More than a hundred thousand replies giving information reached the French Section. These were forwarded to the French Army authorities, and enabled them to clear up the circumstances in which more than 30,000 men had been missed. The number of men still missing of which there were no details, was thus reduced to about 10,000.

In a number of cases, by means of evidence giving precise details of the spot where a man fell, the French "regimental enquiries" enabled relatives to arrange for exhumations and reburials, and to settle questions of inheritance or matters of pension in abeyance. It should be recalled that according to French law, the dependants of a missing man are entitled to a pension, as soon as two witnesses are produced whose evidence as to his death is conclusive and in agreement.

Similar enquiries were also instituted by the Agency on behalf of missing British army personnel. As circumstances were different, instead of enquiries being voluntary, as was the practice for missing men of the French army, they were only made on individual application, or following on collective applications from official or private bodies, such as the War Office or the national Red Cross Societies of the British Commonwealth. This type of enquiry was made by printed forms sent to the

¹ See pp. 108 sqq.

camps, each form bearing the name of the supposed eye-witness, the names of the missing men and a space for the reply. When the names of the witnesses were known, the forms were addressed to them in person. When no names of witnesses were known, or those called upon could give no information, the enquiry was still carried on through the camp leaders, who circulated lists of the missing classified by their units. Some enquiries, although leading to no definite result, proved very useful, because the men named as witnesses and unable to give the evidence required, often volunteered the names of comrades who could supply information, and the enquiry was continued. This last method, termed "snowballing", gave promising results, and was also used for missing men of the French Army.

The same type of printed form was used for missing men of the Army, Air Force or Navy. When returned to the British Section, the statements were carefully examined to determine which could be considered "conclusive", and which were at least "promising". The first definition applied to statements by eye-witnesses which left no doubt as to a man's death; the second applied to statements which gave useful particulars, but which did not reveal any definite facts as to the death. Only these two classes of evidence were used as a basis of information sent to applicants.

Enquiries "by evidence" were also instituted by the German Section after the end of hostilities, to gather information on a number of missing German army personnel.

Mention should also be made of the enquiries "by evidence" which were made amongst the survivors of vessels lost at sea, about missing seamen of all nationalities, especially British, German and Greek. In order to ease the work in this type of enquiry, an index had been made in the Agency, containing over three thousand cards concerning vessels of all nationalities which had been sunk, wrecked, scuttled, damaged or interned. All particulars supplied by Governments or published in the press are filed in this index: particulars of ships, lists of crews and survivors, their landing places, and other details.

All information obtained by evidence was of course transferred to cards, filed in the indexes of the National Sections, and

forwarded to applicants according to the arrangements made with each country.

(E). *Enquiries concerning Civilians.*

From the preceding remarks it will be seen that the Central Agency assumed in behalf of civilian internees¹, and those of similar status (in assigned residence or under supervision), the same duties in all respects as those practised for PW—transmission of information to official bureaux, tracing and enquiries, forwarding of mail, messages, documents and personal belongings. The description in this report of the Agency's work in behalf of PW also applies for these civilians.

As regards other civilians, however, such as political detainees, enemy national at liberty, and civil populations in general, the Agency's activities were confined to opening enquiries and forwarding messages, as the belligerent Powers exchanged no information concerning them.

The following remarks therefore deal with the Central Agency's work in favour of these other civilians. It has seemed necessary to divide the report into two parts, one relating to political detainees and the other to enemy nationals at liberty and civil populations.

(1). *Political Detainees.* — This term covers (1) nationals deprived of liberty by their own State for political reasons, or following on racial persecution, and (2) inhabitants of occupied countries arrested by the occupant and imprisoned, taken as hostages, or deported to the territory of that Power and interned in concentration camps. All these civilians, lacking any protection under the Conventions, found themselves delivered up to arbitrary decisions by the Detaining Powers, and were often submitted to the most rigorous measures of coercion and deprived of all means of giving news of themselves. They were as a rule subject to the supervision of the police authorities.

¹ The term "civilian internees" refers to those nationals of an enemy country who were in belligerent territory at the opening of hostilities, who had been interned, and to whom the Detaining Power, acting on the proposal of the ICRC, had agreed to extend, by analogy, the application of the 1929 Prisoner of War Convention.

It can easily be realized that the Agency's work in behalf of these political detainees was more difficult and more delicate than for any other category of persons. The complete absence of any legal protection reduced the means of action in their behalf and any chance of success in its intervention almost to vanishing point. The relatives of these unfortunate people meanwhile, who were a prey to increasing distress and anxiety, sent constant appeals for information to Geneva. The obstacles encountered, far from discouraging the management of the Agency, only served to increase their concern and their endeavours to help these sorely tried victims of the war.

Enquiries concerning civilian detainees in countries occupied by Axis forces were usually sent to the German Red Cross. When the applicants could indicate the place of detention, enquiries were sent to camp commandants for preference. Most of the steps taken in this way unfortunately had only negative results.

In order to improve this situation, the attempt was made to get in touch with the detainees themselves. For this purpose, one or other of the cards or forms available at the Agency were used (in particular Form 61 and Card 542). As there was a space on these two forms for a reply, the addressee could return them to Geneva, if allowed to do so.

The Agency did not have recourse to this method, if there was any likelihood that the applicant had knowledge of the place of detention by clandestine means; the detainees or their relatives would otherwise have been exposed to police measures. In this type of case, the ability to read between the lines of the application was of major importance and required on the part of the Agency staff both care and judgment.

In some cases these enquiries allowed valuable information to be gained on changes of address, departures for an unknown destination, or deaths. Here too, the utmost caution was necessary in making use of the information received.

The field of action open to the Agency, more particularly with regard to civilians interned in their own country, or persecuted for racial reasons, was even more restricted, as the responsible authorities consistently refused to supply any

information about them. These cases were dealt with by the National Sections and by two special Sections, who made every endeavour to intercede, the one in behalf of stateless civilians, and the other for Jewish families in countries under Axis control¹.

The only regular source of information concerning political detainees which was available to the Agency consisted of receipts returned to the ICRC for parcels sent to concentration camps. These receipts sometimes contained, in addition to the addressee's own name, those of fellow detainees who had seized upon this un hoped-for opportunity of giving news of their existence. Thus, between November 1943 and the end of hostilities, 105,300 names of detainees became known to the Agency.

(2). *Enemy Civiliansn ot deprived of liberty, and civil populations of Belligerent Countries.* — The Agency dealt with countless enquiries relating (1) to enemy aliens in the country of a belligerent or in territory occupied by him, but who had been left at liberty, and (2) to civilians living in their own country, when these two classes were separated from their relatives by a zone of operations, or prevented from corresponding with them by obstacles due to the war. It was in behalf of these people that the Civilian Message scheme, described in detail below², was introduced. Applications concerning civilians of this category were generally passed to the Civilian Message Section, who dealt with them by despatching a Message Form 61, whenever the nature of the application allowed the conditions of this system to apply³.

Owing, however, to the vast movements of population in belligerent countries, either voluntary or enforced, the response to civilian messages was often a matter of chance. Yet it was owing to these very circumstances that relatives were most anxious to obtain news. Moreover, as numbers of civilians

¹ See p. 299 and 301.

² See p. 63.

³ It may be recalled that the text had to deal strictly with matters of family interest, and not to exceed 25 words.

were entirely cut off from their countries of origin and were without means of existence, it was often necessary to solicit the help of expert organizations on the spot in their behalf. Here too, the system was found inadequate to meet a number of applications. Such applications were then passed to the National Sections of the Agency, who endeavoured to give them a proper answer. To this end, they applied to the National Red Cross Societies and to the administrative authorities of countries where these civilians were living, to the Committee's Delegations abroad, or when the problem required the help of a welfare worker, to expert organizations such as the International Social Service. These institutions were approached especially in order to reunite families, to facilitate repatriation or emigration, to assist applicants to carry out formalities and to support their applications.

The class under review also covers "civilian workers", who enlisted voluntarily or were recruited by force in occupied countries to work in Germany, and PW converted into civilian workers. As a rule, these workers, with certain reservations, could correspond with their next of kin. The services of the Agency were, however, called upon when for one reason or another, contact was interrupted. It then acted as an intermediary in forwarding news, or opened enquiries at the request of relatives. Enquiries of this type were usually made from the German Red Cross, from local mayors, and from employers, and good results were obtained on the whole. When civilian workers of some countries were suddenly cut off from their relatives owing to military operations, the transmission of news took on a great expansion. French civilian workers cut off from their own country by the new zone of operations established by the Allied forces in 1944, were a case in point.

IV. FORWARDING OF MAIL, MESSAGES, DOCUMENTS AND SUNDRY ARTICLES

The Agency, as already described, acted as an intermediary between the belligerents, not only for the transmission of information on PW and civilian internees, but also for the forwarding of mail, messages, official and other documents, photographs of PW, of internees and of graves, and, finally, personal effects.

(i) *Mail (Letters and cards)*

Article 36 of the 1929 PW Convention, which governs the transmission of PW personal mail, provides for the exchange of mail by post and by the shortest route. The part of intermediary played by the ICRC was therefore not a matter of obligation. In practice, however, the Agency was always ready to act as intermediary when asked to do so.

The belligerent countries arranged amongst themselves, generally by the channel of the Protecting Powers, for the exchange of PW mail. In respect of Europe (Germany, occupied territories and Italy in particular), throughout the greater part of the war, the exchange took place through the Swiss postal services, in particular in Basle ; the major portion went straight through, by way of the Basle office, from the country of the sender to that of the addressee. Occasionally, however, private persons or postal administrations had reason to think that the Central Agency would be better placed for forwarding mail, as it might have more complete or more recent addresses and that its help would thus ensure more reliable delivery. Such

mail was handed to the Agency, either because the sender clearly specified on the envelope "care of the International Committee of the Red Cross", or because the postal administration in the country of despatch, or the Swiss Postal Services, themselves passed on whole bags of mail to the Agency. Bags of mail were sometimes sent by mistake to the Agency by transit post offices of neutral countries.

By the end of 1946, the Agency had thus received and forwarded nearly 20 million letters and cards. This figure, which in itself represents quite a considerable volume, was only a small proportion of the total mail handled for PW and civilian internees.

This exchange of personal mail, working both ways, went on continuously all through the war. At particular times, however, its scale increased very considerably. Thus, after the operations in Italian East African and Cyrenaica, all mail from Italians captured at that time was sent by the "special bag" between Cairo and Geneva, which was the only possible route. The Agency had also to deal with a considerable increase of mail when Italy was invaded by the Allies in 1943 and British PW in that country were removed to Germany. In these circumstances, mail from next of kin was held up and the Swiss Postal Services, through which it was sent, decided, in agreement with the British postal authorities, to hand it to the Agency in Geneva. The Agency then undertook to readdress the mail when notifications came through from Germany as to the new quarters of these men. Over 800,000 letters and cards were thus forwarded in 1943 and 1944.

Notifications of capture telegraphed by National Sections to the official Information Bureaux of the countries concerned frequently bore no indication of the detention camp. For this reason, many relatives, especially in the U.S.A., sent mail for these PW to the Agency, which meanwhile had been informed of their addresses by the German authorities, and was able therefore, to forward this mail to its destination. In this way, the first contact between next of kin and PW was often made over a month sooner.

The Agency also received a large amount of mail for members

of the forces who had been reported missing by the official Bureaux. The next of kin hoped that information received in Geneva meanwhile would make possible the forwarding of mail to these men, before they themselves had been informed of the addresses.

As far as possible, addresses on letters and cards to PW were checked by reference to data in the card-indexes. The National Sections which received an ever increasing volume of PW mail, such as the British, German and Italian Sections, set up separate sub-sections for the handling and despatch of letters. In other Sections this work was done by the card-index staff or by the checking clerks.

When, however, exceptionally large quantities of mail came in, e.g. in the Italian Section in 1943, it was a physical impossibility for the Agency to check all the mail. A limit had to be set and only trial scrutinies were made before forwarding letters.

Some National Sections made extensive use of PW private mail as a source of information. Letters sent by PW to their relatives were likely to provide reliable indications, particularly of the writers' whereabouts, and often enabled the Agency to supply valuable information to the official Bureaux. Information cards, supplementary to those already in the index, were set up on the basis of these data.

The Italian Section made most use of this source of information. Owing to the slow arrival at Geneva of capture cards and lists of Italian PW, the camp addresses on the letters written by these men to their relatives often provided the first information received by the Agency. Over a million information cards were made out by this Section from data contained in these letters, during the East African campaign in 1941. Several successive cards were often made out relating to the same man, as he himself was moved to new camps.

Obviously, this method could not be used without certain judgment, as it delayed transmission of PW mail. It was employed only when other information was recognizably and consistently lacking.

Finally, the transmission through the Agency of a part of PW and civilian internee mail provided valuable information

from the outset on the general efficiency of PW post. The National Sections carefully assembled all data on this subject, particularly on the time required for mail to get through, and handed them to the Advisory Group attached to the Agency Management, who were thus able to supply the necessary material upon which the Committee could act.

(2) *Messages*

Neither the recommendations of the ICRC, nor the endeavours of the countries involved, nor the considerable help given by the Agency, could always ensure the normal transmission of PW and civilian internee mail. Despite the co-operation of the postal administrations of neutral countries or of the Agency, this transmission depended primarily on the working of the postal service in belligerent countries.

So many obstacles hampered this traffic—destructions of means of transport, congestion of censor's offices—that new methods of transmission had to be brought into general use. There was, further, a large class of people the ICRC could not neglect, namely, the free civilians who wished to communicate with their relatives in an enemy country. These people had no hope of making the contact themselves, as original letters could not pass hostile frontiers. No convention and no agreement gave these people the right to get in touch with each other.

The types of Messages instituted to give PW and civilian internees a sure means of making contact with their relatives and getting news from them were the *Telegraphic Message* and the *Express Message*.

For free civilians in enemy countries, the Committee set up the system of *Civilian Messages*.

Before describing these types of messages, mention should be made of a last means of transmitting news from PW and internees to their relatives, which grew naturally out of the circumstances. The Committee's delegates were in the habit, when visiting camps, of collecting short messages from PW who were without news of their relatives and of sending them with

the delegation mail to the Central Agency, whence they were transmitted to the next of kin. In some countries and at certain periods, this service became very extensive. This was particularly the case in British India in respect of Italian PW transferred there in 1940 and 1941. Despatch of capture cards and lists from British official Information Bureaux had suffered considerable delay. Thanks to the Committee's delegates, initial contact was made, and was kept up for many months. The delegates, when drawing up lists of PW—the first information transmitted to the Agency—were also given long lists of messages by the camp leaders, in particular from wounded and sick PW. These messages were sent to the Agency, which then forwarded them to the Italian Red Cross.

In other cases, the PW or internees who could not get into touch with their relatives because of the lack of postal communications, sent letters or messages of their own accord to the Agency. The latter sorted and listed them ; they were then transmitted to the delegations or to the authorized offices in the country concerned, with the request that they be sent on to the relatives. This method was of particular service to the natives of the French colonies who were PW in Germany (North Africans, Malagasies, Annamites and others)¹.

Finally, camp leaders often sent to the Agency, of their own accord, lists of PW who had been some time without news of their relatives. These lists were usually checked and any useful data were recorded on cards. The lists were then sent to the National Red Cross, or to some other responsible organization in the country of destination, who ensured contact with the families concerned. This was done in the case of German PW in Canada and the United States, and of PW from India in Germany.

¹ Some of these transmissions were made by wireless. Thus, messages for Indo-China were transmitted by the French broadcasting authorities in the form of 25-words messages, drawn up by the Agency's Colonial Section on the basis of prisoners' letters to their relatives. This system was of very great service.

(A). *Telegraphic Messages.*

These are the only messages mentioned in the 1929 Convention (Art. 38, Sec. 3), which provides that PW may, in cases of recognized urgency, be authorized to send telegrams on payment of the usual charges. In practice, this permission was granted very grudgingly by most belligerents. The Central Agency, however, transmitted several thousand telegrams containing messages from PW or internees to their families¹, and sent on the replies received. These telegrams were never sent direct by the PW themselves, but always through a National Red Cross, for German PW in the United States ; through the Committee's delegation for Italian PW in India, or through the camp leaders in the case of British and American PW in Germany. These message telegrams, just as the letters and cards of the PW mail, were often checked in the Agency card-index.

An extensive use of telegraphic messages was made towards the end of the war for the benefit of detainees in Japanese hands.

Correspondence between Allied PW and internees in Japanese hands and their relatives was, from the very beginning of the war, a very difficult question. Not only was this mail strictly controlled by the Japanese military authorities, but postal communications, which had always been faulty and slow, finally came near to breaking down altogether. The systematic use of the postal Express Messages, too, had been opposed by the Japanese authorities. In these conditions, great relief was felt when, in 1944, the Japanese Government proposed the exchange, through the intermediary of the ICRC, of telegraphic messages between PW and civilian internees in Japan and in territories under Japanese control, and their relatives, on the basis of one outward-and-return telegram per head and per year. The proposal was immediately accepted by the British, American and Netherlands Governments, and the system was put into practice at the beginning of 1945. The National Red

¹ Apart from cables sent under the Telegraphic Message Scheme for the Far East, of which mention will be made later.

Cross Societies of the countries concerned assumed responsibility for the cost.

On arrival at the Agency, the telegrams were first sent to the Registry Section for the costs to be recorded and then handed to the British Section for transmission, as the majority of PW in Japanese hands were British nationals. The forwarding was done by means of separate telegrams for each person concerned.

In practice, the scheme only worked satisfactorily for telegrams sent by relatives to PW. The Agency received 61,000 messages of this kind and sent them on to the Japanese official Bureau.

The arrangement, however, for telegrams from PW to next of kin, did not come up to expectation : the Agency received only 2,400 messages from Japan for transmission.

(B). *Express Messages.*

This type of message, initiated by the ICRC in the summer of 1942, was exclusively reserved for PW and civilian internees who had had no news from their relatives for over three months, and for families similarly placed. It was designed to meet the delays and failures of the PW mail, and about twenty countries, including Germany and Italy, agreed to its use.

The Express Message took the form of a sheet printed on air-mail paper, bearing the Committee's heading and comprising two detachable leaves, one bearing the message, and the other to be used for the reply. Each leaf bore in front the names and addresses of the senders. The number of words to be sent was not limited, but the whole text had to be contained in five lines, on the back.

The Express Message forms were issued to PW and internees by the camp leaders, and to relatives by the National Red Cross Societies. The sender wrote out the message and passed it on to the same intermediary. Messages were forwarded by the most rapid means, whenever possible by air, to the Central Agency, which sent them on also by the quickest route. In the countries which had agreed to the scheme the censor gave

them priority over ordinary mail. As for the PW mail, messages were exempt from postal charges, with the exception of air postage dues.

By June 30, 1947, the Agency had handled 1,355,000 Express Messages, in and out. The scheme was, on the whole, satisfactory, but it must be borne in mind that these messages were only intended as a palliative against delays in the PW mail, and were not meant to serve as a substitute for the ordinary post operating in normal conditions. They served to particularly good purpose between Europe and countries overseas, and were used to a great extent by German PW in America and their families in Germany. In other circumstances, however, the time gained by their use was negligible and, in such cases, the authorities concerned were very guarded in their view of the scheme, which proved costly for the senders when they had to pay air postage, as in the case of British PW in Germany and their relatives.

As they went through the hands of the Agency, the Express Messages were carefully examined by the National Sections, to prevent any abuse of the scheme. As in the case of ordinary PW mail, the messages were checked in the card-index whenever it seemed useful. This was particularly done when they came from a camp as yet unknown to the Agency, or from one which was believed not to have announced all the PW it held, or in cases where the addresses were incomplete. Information of interest was placed on cards and indexed. Each message received the ICRC stamp before dispatch, and was recorded, so that the printing costs and postage dues (airmail) might be recovered.

(C). *Civilian Message Scheme for the transmission of messages between free civilians.*

The outbreak of war at once interrupted postal communications between belligerent States. A great number of civilians who were thus cut off from their families applied to the ICRC in the hope that it could help them. The Agency then received a very large number of letters for free civilians in enemy count-

ries. No agreement could be cited to ensure their being forwarded. Previous experience in these matters enabled the ICRC, in the autumn of 1939, to set up a separate department—the Civilian Message Section—which had to summarize the letters received into 25-word messages, upon particular forms, called *Civilian Messages* or *Family Messages*.

During the first World War, the Committee had observed the deep anxiety of families who were without news of their relatives, and it gave much thought to finding means of contact between next of kin separated by war operations. Thus, in 1916, the first service was organized for transmitting civilian messages on behalf of the populations of certain occupied territories (Northern France, Balkans). In May 1918, the Committee established a message service, reserved however for civilian internees, between the United States and the Central Powers, on forms established by the American Red Cross, and from which, in fact, the present Civilian Message form derived.

The ICRC had also made a careful study of the question during the Spanish Civil War, and had arranged a system of 25-word messages for use by civilians separated by the fighting areas. These messages were assembled by the delegates and forwarded to Geneva ; from there they were sent on to the addressees. Over five million messages were thus transmitted from one area to another.

The original Message Form which came into use in 1939, called "Form 61" according to its reference number, bore the heading of the ICRC. On one side were inscribed the names and addresses of the sender and receiver, and the text of the message ; the reply was written on the back. Both messages and replies were limited to 25-words each, and only news of a private or family nature was allowed. The whole system was based upon the strict observance of these two particular restrictions, and the Civilian Message Section carefully checked the texts of all messages which passed through its hands.

During the first months of the war, this Section summarized as many as one thousand letters per day. The staff of four rapidly increased to 150. Letters arrived, however, in such large quantities that it was no longer possible to avoid increasing delays

in transcription. The Committee was consequently obliged to propose to Governments and National Red Cross Societies of belligerent States that the Civilian Message Scheme should be modified to allow senders to write their own messages on Form 61¹. The German and British Governments were the first to accept the suggestion, and gave over to their National Red Cross Societies the task of contriving the technical means for making the scheme work, with due regard to the censorship regulations. The first messages in this form arrived from Germany on December 26, 1939, and from Great Britain on February 15, 1940. Following their example, most of the other countries adopted the Committee's suggestion, and by the end of the war, over one hundred different bodies (National Red Cross Societies and other agencies) had issued printed forms similar to Form 61, bearing their headings, for distribution to private individuals². After being filled in by the senders, the forms were assembled by the National Red Cross Societies³ and dispatched to the Central Agency, which saw to the transmission to the various countries, without having to go through the labour of transcribing the texts.

Although correspondence by this means was strictly reserved for the exchange of news between civilians resident in enemy countries, an exception was made in favour of civilians living in neutral countries, when postal communications with the exterior were interrupted by the war.

The threefold object of the Civilian Message Section was as follows :

- (1) To transcribe requests for news from letters to Form 61 ;
- (2) To receive, check and despatch Forms 61 arriving from abroad ;

¹ An account of the negotiations will be found in Vol. I.

² See p. 72 showing the list of National Red Cross Societies which adopted the Civilian Message Scheme.

³ In no case were private individuals allowed to send civilian messages direct to the Central Agency. The messages had to be sent by way of National Red Cross Societies or through the delegates of the ICRC when, for any reason, the Societies were unable to carry out this service, for instance at Shanghai in respect of occupied China.

(3) To receive, check and despatch by telegram or by Form 61 telegraphic messages received at the Central Agency.

(1). *Transcription of letters.* — By the end of June 1947, 425,500 letters had been transcribed on Forms 61. This work, which at first was very heavy, gradually decreased as the use of Form 61 by correspondents themselves became more general.

On arrival at the Agency, letters for transcription were first sorted according to language. The contents of each letter were then summarized in 25 words on Form 61 by persons with a sound knowledge of the language. A receipt on Form 232 was forwarded to each sender, and the message was then dispatched.

In this process, the same reference number was inscribed on the original letter, on the Form 61 and on the acknowledgement. The original letter was then filed and could be easily traced through the reference number.

(2). *Civilian messages received from abroad.* — After assembling the forms filled in by the senders, the National Red Cross Societies forwarded them to Geneva, together with a list in duplicate of the messages. One copy of the list was returned as a receipt, and the other kept at Geneva for making out a record, indicating the origin, date of departure and arrival of the batch, and the number of messages by country of destination. This was the only record kept by the Agency of Form 61 messages which passed through Geneva.

The enquiry and reply forms were separated and sorted according to language. Then the staff familiar with the particular language checked the text of each message, deleting all allusions to political, military, or economic matters, thus keeping the scheme strictly within its prescribed scope, i.e. messages limited to purely personal and family matters. The difficulties encountered by the staff will be realized from the fact that the messages were written in almost every language. Each message was then stamped with the Committee's stamp, to show that the text had been checked. The addresses were also checked and completed, when necessary.

After being sorted for each country, the messages were sent

to the National Red Cross Societies, each parcel being accompanied by a list in duplicate of the contents, one copy of which to be returned to Geneva as an acknowledgment. The Societies then distributed the messages to the addressees, indicating how the replies should be sent.

Civilian messages, unlike PW mail, were not exempt from postage dues, and the forwarding charges were the responsibility of the senders. The Civilian Message Section sent regular debit notes to the National Societies concerned, based on the number of messages forwarded at a fixed rate per message.

Among the civilian messages received by the Agency from Red Cross centres, some were sent by, or were intended for PW, civilian internees or deportees. These categories of persons were allowed by the ICRC to use the Civilian Message Scheme when they had no means of corresponding by PW mail. These forms were not handled by the Civilian Message Section, but by the National Sections who, when dealing with them, noted the requests expressed therein, made out cards and opened enquiries when necessary. As already mentioned¹, the National Sections also dealt with requests from free civilians which could not be handled by the Civilian Message Section.

It was considered most important that messages which for some reason could not be delivered should be sent back to Geneva. To avoid causing anxiety to the enquirers by sending back the message with the bare remark "Gone away", the ICRC requested all National Red Cross Societies to make individual enquiries when the addressees could not be found. By this means, it was sometimes possible to find the persons concerned, or at least to obtain information concerning them. If the addressee had died, the enquiry so made often led to information regarding the date and cause of death. Deaths of near relatives were reported to National Red Cross Societies by the Civilian Message Section on a special form (No. 1155).

(3). *Civilian Messages by Telegram.* — In order to meet the delays in postal communications, the Committee adopted a

¹ See p. 54.

scheme for exchanging civilian messages by telegram. In December 1941, a department was set up within the Civilian Message Section with that object ; its work increased as communications became more and more affected by the havoc of the war.

Messages sent by telegram were, as a general rule, forwarded by telegram to addresses overseas, in countries with which postal communications were impaired, or by special request. If, however, telegraphic communications with the country of destination were interrupted, or if this was sufficiently near Switzerland to render a telegram superfluous, the messages were forwarded by Form 61. Requests for transmission by telegram received by letter or by Form 61, were of course always met by the despatch of a telegram.

As the working of the Telegraphic Message Scheme followed the same lines as for Form 61, the organization of the two departments was similar ; no further explanations are therefore necessary under this heading. It may be observed, however, that the charges for telegrams forwarded were debited to the National Red Cross Societies from whom the requests were received.

In order to meet the military censorship requirements, telegraphic messages and replies were always sent in the official language of the country for which they were intended, whatever the language of the original text.

Up to June 1947, the Telegraphic Message Section forwarded over 134,600 messages.

Summary of the Development of the Civilian Message Section. — The work of the Civilian Message Section was in close relation to the events of war. From the outbreak of hostilities, the Section transcribed on Forms 61 a great number of letters addressed to Poles by anxious relatives. The Battle of France, in the spring of 1940, also brought about the first heavy influx of messages. It soon became necessary to sort the messages addressed to France according to the zone (free or occupied) for which they were intended, and then to send them on to Lyons and Vichy, or to Paris. A considerable part of the work

was done for the exchange of messages between French refugees in Great Britain and their relatives in France. A great many messages were also exchanged between the Belgian, Dutch and Norwegian refugees in Great Britain and their home countries. Mention should also be made of the organization, in the autumn of 1940, of an exchange of messages between Great Britain and the Channel Islands, through the German Red Cross ; a large part of the population had taken refuge in England at the time of the invasion, and these messages therefore increased very much in number.

The fighting in the Balkans (spring of 1941) and the entrance of the United States into war (December 1941), brought about a very large inflow of messages to Geneva. In the spring of 1942, most of the South American countries adopted the scheme. So did Japan ; in January 1943, the Agency began to receive from the Japanese Red Cross civilian message forms, written in Japanese.

The severance of contact between members of the same family was felt much more when a State was divided by the fighting line. Thus, in November 1942, the Allied landing cut off North Africa from metropolitan France with which, as regards family ties, it formed one single area.

The Allied landing led to a fixed fighting line, which persisted over a long period and could be compared to the French front in 1914-1918. Over a million and a half messages passed through Geneva until normal postal communications between France and North Africa were resumed. There was no similar situation in France itself in 1940, nor yet in 1944 when, on each occasion, the pace of the war was too rapid to allow time to organize the exchange of messages between areas separated by the front. The Committee did its best to cope with the situation but, before the scheme could begin to work, the purpose for it had disappeared, as the fighting area no longer existed. From June 1940 to November 1941, when France was divided by the demarcation line, the French Government itself was responsible for the transmission of messages from one zone to another. The work of the Civilian Message Section was, however, considerable seeing that the number of civilian messages despatched

in France and handled by Geneva up to June 30, 1947, exceeded four and a half million.

Whereas the rapid changes in the military situation had not left sufficient time to organise the exchange of messages in France, the situation was otherwise in Italy. Here the country was divided by the fighting line from July 1943 until the end of the war, a fact that explains the large number of civilian messages handled on behalf of Italy—some three million up to June 30, 1947.

In 1944, the Allied advance through France and Belgium suspended postal communications with Germany. The French and Belgian civilian workers in Germany, who had been able to correspond freely with their families, were now cut off by the fighting line. From the beginning of October 1944, the Agency received large quantities of letters which could not be sent through normal channels. The Committee therefore made fresh efforts to have the family message scheme extended to civilian workers. Its endeavours were successful, and over four million Forms 61 went through the Agency within the following months. The Agency was once more faced with a heavy task, due to the enormous number of messages received and also to the fact that most of the relatives had given addresses that were insufficient or incorrect, frequently lacking the postal district number. The addresses had to be completed or rectified at Geneva, and the letters sorted, by departments for France and by postal districts for Germany. The messages sometimes accumulated to such an extent that some of the National Sections put their own work aside to help the Civilian Message staff.

During the Allied advance in Germany, in 1945, the march of events was so rapid that there was no time to organize the exchange of messages between civilians living on either side of the fighting zone.

Such were the chief stages of the work of the Civilian Message Section during the recent war. Circumstances prevented it from handling the exchange of news between the German civilian population and their connections abroad, until regular postal services were re-established. Even when the war had

ended, postal communications were restored only by slow degrees : the work of the Civilian Message Section therefore continued at relatively high pressure, but slackened during the following months.

When the frontier between France and Spain was closed in 1946, an exchange of civilian messages between the two countries took place: about 14,000 messages went through the Central Agency.

It may be claimed that the Civilian Message Scheme represents one of the most interesting achievements of the Committee. The Civilian Message Section was one of the most important departments, if we consider the number of cases dealt with, and one of the most significant in the work of the Agency as a whole. By September 1943, some ten million civilian messages had been handled in Geneva: up to June 30, 1947, the total was roughly 24,000,000. During the last years of the war, the average number of arrivals exceeded 20,000 daily. The results obtained are all the more worthy of remark, since the principle of forwarding correspondence between free civilians of enemy countries always met with great opposition.

It is common knowledge that States at war are extremely afraid of any secret transmission, leakage or divulgence of information and that they inflict the heaviest penalties for such offences, branding them as "intelligence with the enemy". In a country at war, the powers of the censorship are unbounded: any deflection from the rule of silence is regarded as dangerous or criminal. In spite of these facts, the Committee succeeded in inducing the Governments concerned to accept the principle of correspondence between relatives and friends separated by the battle front, and it ensured the working of the scheme without any controversy throughout the course of the war. Over one hundred associations (National Red Cross Societies or branches of the Red Cross, etc.) took part in the exchange of news between families. The principle of such an exchange already has the sanction of national legislation in certain countries, pending its embodiment in an international Convention.

Number of Civilian Messages forwarded

First messages			Total as on 30-6-47
1939			
Dec. 26	German Red Cross	Berlin	2,632,189
1940			
Feb. 15	British Red Cross	London	2,676,220
— 16	South African Red Cross	Johannesburg	171,428
Apr. 19	Rhodesian Red Cross	Salisbury	12,390
May 11	New Zealand Red Cross	Wellington	19,842
— 13	Danish Red Cross	Copenhagen	263,760
— 18	American Red Cross	Washington	1,014,134
— 21	Lithuanian Red Cross	Vilna	279
— 24	Brazilian Red Cross	Rio de Janeiro	49,085
— 24	Rumanian Red Cross	Bucharest	103,870
June 6	Canadian Red Cross	Toronto	122,142
— 15	ICRC Delegation, Egypt	Cairo	238,026
— 15	Hungarian Red Cross	Budapest	195,608
— 15	Italian Red Cross	Rome	2,999,910
— 15	Latvian Red Cross	Riga	164
— 15	Portuguese Red Cross	Lisbon	6,179
July 1	Slovak Red Cross	Bratislava	53,453
— 6	Yugoslav Red Cross	Belgrade	22,983
— 6	Netherlands Red Cross, Curaçao	Willemstad	10,551
— 20	Argentine Red Cross	Buenos Aires	49,268
— 27	Chilian Red Cross	Santiago	12,940
— 27	Ecuadorian Red Cross	Quito	2,433
Aug. 10	French Red Cross, Middle East	Beyrouth	26,145
— 10	Netherlands Red Cross	The Hague	1,038,791
— 17	French Red Cross	Paris	4,547,431
— 17	Norwegian Red Cross	Oslo	216,696
— 24	Belgian Red Cross	Brussels	1,075,009
— 24	Spanish Red Cross	Madrid	32,632
Sept. 14	Polish Red Cross	Warsaw	20,878
Oct. 10	Estonian Red Cross	Tallin	50
— 18	Uruguayan Red Cross	Montevideo	4,409
— 24	Belgian Red Cross, Belgian Congo	Leopoldville	109,396
— 29	Irish Red Cross	Dublin	9,657
— 29	Icelandic Red Cross	Reykjavik	6,844
Nov. 11	Australian Red Cross	Melbourne	110,319
— 12	British Red Cross, Sudan	Khartoum	1,703
— 12	Serv. Soc. Aide aux Emigrants	Paris	318,214
— 12	Siamese Red Cross	Bangkok	3,015

First messages		Total as on 30-6-47
Nov. 12	Cuban Red Cross	2,451
— 28	British Red Cross, Palestine	363,777
— 28	Luxemburg Red Cross	9,838
Dec. 10	German Red Cross, Channel Islands	760,348
— 23	German Red Cross, General Gov.	127,255
— 23	Greek Red Cross	203,412

1941

Jan. 9	Swedish Red Cross	Stockholm	7,474
— 12	Finnish Red Cross	Helsinki	15,489
— 21	Japanese Red Cross	Tokyo	42,750
Feb. 12	Albanian Red Cross	Tirana	16,724
— 28	Netherlands Red Cross, Guiana	Paramaribo	7,704
Apr. 9	Bulgarian Red Cross	Sofia	21,092
— 18	Burmese Red Cross	Rangoon	117
— 21	British Red Cross, Newfoundland	St. John	206
— 22	Mexican Red Cross	Mexico	10,085
— 24	Indian Red Cross	New Delhi	23,166
May 15	Croatian Red Cross	Zagreb	12,614
— 15	Netherlands Red Cross	Batavia	111,193
July 1	Serbian Red Cross	Belgrade	12,546
Sept. 3	British Red Cross, Trinidad	Port of Spain	834
— 4	French Red Cross, Indo-China	Saigon	6,080
— 14	French Red Cross, Morocco	Casablanca	563,682
Oct. 2	Netherlands Red Cross	London	165,861
— 15	Peruvian Red Cross	Lima	9,555
— 19	ICRC Delegation, Turkey	Ankara	12,202
Nov. 21	British Red Cross, Kenya	Nairobi	14,070
— 24	French Red Cross, Algeria	Algiers	926,667
Dec. 1	French Red Cross, Tunisia	Tunis	145,333

1942

Feb. 2	British Red Cross, Faroe Islands	London	11,378
— 8	British Red Cross, Ceylon	Colombo	1,720
— 26	British Red Cross, Bahamas	Nassau	108
March 5	British Red Cross, Uganda	Kampala	2,123
— 6	British Red Cross, Malay Straits	Singapore	292
— 12	British Red Cross, Mauritius	Curepipe	1,639
— 24	British Red Cross, Bermudas	Hamilton	397
Apr. 22	Italian Red Cross, It. W. Africa	Mogadiscio	338,324
June 8	British Red Cross, Jamaica	Kingston	301
— 17	German Red Cross, Eastern Area	Berlin	24,974
— 28	ICRC Delegation, China	Shanghai	103,947

First messages		Total as on 30-6-47
July 7	French Red Cross, Fr. W. Africa	160,104
Aug. 3	Columbian Red Cross	8,691
— 7	Panamese Red Cross	1,211
— 10	Haitian Red Cross	1,136
— 10	San Salvador Red Cross	1,788
— 10	Venezuelan Red Cross	7,449
— 10	Bolivian Red Cross	3,999
— 11	Costa Rica Red Cross	453
— 12	Red Lion and Sun, Iran	6,871
— 13	French Red Cross, Fr. E. Africa	5,494
— 14	Guatemalan Red Cross	1,885
— 14	Iraqi Red Crescent	1,426
— 24	Paraguayan Red Cross	2,141
— 28	Turkish Red Crescent	1,830
Sept. 9	Portuguese Red Cross, Port. W. Africa	1,597
— 22	Dominican Red Cross	586
— 22	French Red Cross, Somaliland	3,239
— 30	Nicaraguan Red Cross	190
Oct. 8	Honduras Red Cross	980
Dec. 14	ICRC Delegation, China	1,233

1943

May 21	French Red Cross, Madagascar	Tananarive	9,999
— 31	British Red Cross, Gambia	Bathurst	3
June 30	French Red Cross, New Caledonia	Noumea	1,140
— 30	Chinese Red Cross	Chungking	6,205
— 30	British Red Cross, Gold Coast	Accra	817
July 21	Italian Red Cross, Lybia	Tripoli	52,537
Nov. 29	French Red Cross, Martinique	Fort-de-France	1,927
Dec. 9	British Red Cross, Sierra Leone	Freetown	123
— 22	French Red Cross, Corsica	Bastia	38,917
— 23	French Red Cross, Tahiti	Papeete	405

1944

Jan. 20	French Red Cross, Guadeloupe	Pointe-à-Pitre	1,065
— 20	French Red Cross, Guiana	Cayenne	732

1945

July 23	ICRC Delegation, Austria	Vienna	185,222
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Other organizations, also messages by cable, messages transcribed from letters, etc.

1,154,847

Total as on June 30, 1947

23,922,013

(3) *Transmission of official or legal documents*

The transmission of official or legal documents generally devolves upon the Protecting Powers. The Central Agency was, however, called upon to perform these duties when no Protecting Power was available. This was the position for German PW in North Africa in French hands, as the German Government had not recognized the Provisional French Government. Numerous public and private offices who were called upon to send official or legal documents to the opposite side often transmitted them through Geneva.

Documents of many descriptions were thus sent through the National Sections of the Agency ; they were for the most part powers of attorney and contracts of all kinds, including marriage contracts, paternity certificates, divorce papers, wills, bills of sale, bank statements and other business papers, as well as allotment forms¹.

In general, the Agency kept no records of these transmissions except the duplicates of the accompanying lists. Important documents, however, were registered by the National Sections on index cards. Photostats were also made of documents such as wills, which could not be replaced in case of loss. Some Sections found it necessary to have photostats made of all the documents which passed through their hands, when the risk of loss appeared particularly high. The Italian Section took this precaution, from 1944 to the end of the war, for all documents intended for Northern Italy. The risk from air bombardments became so great towards the end of this period that it was decided to keep all originals in the Italian Section and to forward only the photostats.

A variety of agencies sent documents to the Agency, or received them from this source ; they included the official Information Bureaux and National Red Cross Societies, further, camp leaders and delegates of the ICRC. The documents usually

¹ An "allotment form" is a document by which a man on service gives authority for the payment to his family, or third persons, of all or part of his army pay.

reached Geneva in parcels, with accompanying lists of contents. When forwarding documents, some Sections—e.g. the French Section—attached explanatory notes as to their use, together with accompanying vouchers, of which the counterfoils, signed by the receivers and returned by the camp leader, served as receipts.

(4) *Transmission of photographs*

Large numbers of photographs of PW and internees, also photographs of funerals and graves, were sent to Geneva by camp leaders, National Red Cross Societies and delegates of the ICRC. These were forwarded to the official Information Bureaux, or the Red Cross Societies of the countries of origin, for transmission to next of kin. In the same manner, the Agency forwarded to camps large numbers of photographs received from relatives.

The exchange of photographs between PW and their relatives raised no particular difficulties, as it was, in fact, part of the PW mail. The question of exchanging photographs of funerals and graves, however, led to negotiations between the belligerent Powers, through the intermediary of the ICRC, this exchange being considered as a means to check the application of the Articles of the Convention relating to the burial of PW who died in captivity, and to the upkeep of the graves. While agreement was unanimous concerning photographs of graves, some objections were raised, on principle, by certain belligerents with regard to photographs of funerals.

Among the great number of photographs which passed through the Agency, mention should be made of the photographs of German PW in Great Britain, deceased since 1944, which were forwarded by the British Red Cross in neat individual folders. This example was at once followed by the German Red Cross, which had photographs taken of the graves of British PW and sent these on with the same care.

(5) *Transmission of personal effects*

The 1929 Geneva Convention relating to the wounded and sick provides that belligerents shall collect and transmit to

each other all articles of a personal nature found on the battle-field or on the dead, in particular one half of the identity disc. The PW Convention provides that the Information Bureaux of the belligerent Powers shall arrange similar exchanges with regard to personal effects, valuables, correspondence, pay-books, identity tokens etc., found on deceased PW. Most of the belligerents, taking the view that one of the particular duties of the Central Agency was to carry out these transmissions, of their own accord began sending to Geneva the objects found on battle-fields or in hospitals.

In order to ensure the receipt, custody and transmission of these effects, the Agency was obliged to set up a separate department—the Personal Effects Section. The work of this Section was particularly affecting as it called up the memory of the fallen. The large numbers of letters received at Geneva showed the great sentimental value attached to these objects, in many cases small, well-worn personal possessions, which when they arrive break the silence that falls after the bare notice that a man has died.

It should be mentioned here that the numerous cases handled by the Personal Effects Section covered, as far as can be ascertained, only part of the total quantity of objects found, and which the belligerents were called upon to exchange. A great part of the personal belongings collected was exchanged direct between the various countries, through the Protecting Power or following special agreements concluded between the occupying Powers and the countries of origin of the deceased. This was the case, from 1940 to 1944, between Germany and France, and for this reason very few of the objects received at Geneva had belonged to members of the French forces.

At other times, lack of transport and means of communication prevented a normal exchange of personal belongings. In the Far East, for instance, no exchange could be organized whilst the war still continued, and the matter was dealt with after the war by the Allied authorities.

It should also be borne in mind that in many cases no belongings were found on those killed in action, members of the air forces shot down, or bodies washed up on shore: they

might have been lost or destroyed during action, or stolen at the time.

The Personal Effects Section first formed part of the general services of the ICRC, until it was attached to the Central Agency in 1943. Closer contact with the National Sections was found necessary, since these were better placed for pursuing individual enquiries, in response to requests of next of kin for the return of personal belongings. It was also decided that the Personal Effects Section should only deal with the custody and transmission of personal possessions. This work involved the receiving, registration and dispatch of such property. All cases handled were recorded in a card-index, and reference cards were made out for all the National Sections concerned. The established rule was that the arrival of personal belongings did not warrant the Agency giving a notification of death. The business of the Agency was confined to sending on the effects, whilst leaving it to the official Bureaux to make their own deductions after receiving the articles.

As the personal effects of members of the Italian forces had, by reason of events, to be kept in Geneva from 1943, the Italian Section made use, when it had occasion, of the source of information provided by these objects and the papers attached to them. This information was especially valuable when the property was that of a man killed in action, of whom the Section had no other information, or only inadequate details. With these intentions the Section carefully examined many hundreds of collections of personal effects ; by that means it was able to complete or amplify the information supplied by the Allied authorities, and to establish numerous identifications¹.

Most of the belongings received came from official Information Bureaux, either direct or through the channel of diplomatic representatives in Switzerland, or of delegations of the ICRC (personal effects of deceased Germans returned from the U.S.A.). Individual or collective dispatches were also made by other

¹ The family addresses found among personal belongings allowed, in particular, to make distinctions between parcels bearing the same name.

organizations (National Red Cross Societies, relief societies, etc.), and by private persons.

Whilst the war was still going on, transmission was made either through the official Bureaux direct, by the delegations of the ICRC in various countries, or through the consular offices in Geneva, to which the property was handed over by the Agency.

Among the principal transmissions carried out during the war was a consignment sent to London in 1944, containing three thousand collections, packed in thirty-nine cases weighing over three tons. The consignment was sent by rail to Marseilles and from there by one of the ships in the service of the ICRC to Lisbon, where it was handed over to the British consular authorities for the remainder of the journey.

After the end of the war, the Agency received large quantities of personal belongings, the property of deceased German service-men, chiefly forwarded by the American official Bureau. Within a short time, over 60,000 collections had reached Geneva : they could not be forwarded, as the German official Bureau was no longer in existence. In 1946, it was therefore decided that the Agency staff should itself undertake the search among the objects for home addresses, so that the effects might be sent on to next of kin when circumstances permitted.

In order to carry out this considerable task, the staff of the Section had to be increased : a team of fifteen persons had to be put on to the work, which took several months to accomplish.

During the summer of 1947, all personal possessions for which the home address had been found were sent on to the German agency which had, meanwhile, been instructed by the Allied Control Council in Berlin to act as a centre for the collection of the effects of German service-men, and to see that they reached the next of kin.

To give an idea of the difficulties met by the Section in the course of this work, the following practical details may be of interest. The articles to be checked were usually personal property in daily use, such as wallets, purses, watches, penknives, combs, rings, religious tokens and masses of papers of all descriptions—military or civilian identity documents, letters,

photographs, etc. The principal means of identification was, of course, the study of military or civilian identity papers. In very many cases, however, these documents were missing and other evidence had to be sought. A single name and address in a note book or on the back of a photograph were sometimes sufficient ; the contents of letters sometimes showed the rank and army post office of the deceased, and the name and address of the sender.

The work was made very arduous on account of the bad condition of the articles examined. In many cases, papers had, for weeks or months, been exposed to all weathers, buried under debris or in the ground ; they were often torn, tattered, soiled with oil or dirt, sometimes half-burnt, bore traces of blood, or pus, were soaked with rain or bespattered with mud.

Documents which could not be deciphered were handed to a chemist, who made a special study of this work of deciphering "illegible" papers in a small laboratory at the Agency. Although his equipment was elementary—an ultra-violet lamp, a small supply of reagents, and a few sheets of green and yellow cellophane—he managed to make out nearly all the documents which first seemed illegible.

Papers soiled by earth or mud spots were first washed in alcohol. For spots of other descriptions, all the usual solvents were tried in turn ; blood spots were generally treated with peroxide of hydrogen.

To decipher illegible writing the documents were either placed in a tinted light to show up faded parts, or in an ultra-violet ray ; this brought out the text which had been damaged or discoloured by damp. According to the nature of the ink used, various reagents were used to show up the text. Finally, when all other methods had failed, the documents were submitted to heat tests.

Metal identity discs were usually in good condition and became legible after slight cleaning. The most damaged were placed in a solution of soda or potassium hydrate, which restored them completely within a few minutes.

German identity discs only bore regimental numbers and units, which were not sufficient for Geneva to establish names

and addresses of next of kin. When sorted, therefore, the Agency forwarded a list of identity disc numbers to the office where the record of the German personnel by regimental numbers and units was held.

The Personal Effects Section handled, up to June 30, 1947, some 90,500 collections, of which 76,000 were German, 7,300 British, 3,500 Italian and 500 French. Of that number, it had been possible to forward 89,400 collections.

V. THE USE OF BROADCASTING BY THE CENTRAL AGENCY

In 1943, the ICRC took up the question of the use of the wireless to meet the deficiencies in postal and telegraphic communications. It appeared obvious that the radio could be put to useful purpose in the transmission over long distances of lists, messages, communications to delegations of the ICRC in distant countries, and in sending out replies to applications from individuals.

The broadcasting of messages from PW and civilian internees to their relatives met with so many difficulties of a political and technical nature that it could not be organized in a systematic fashion during the War, one of the principal obstacles being the difficulty of obtaining replies to messages.

Nevertheless, the broadcasting of lists and messages received by the Central Agency, and of communications to the delegates of the ICRC abroad, which as a rule required no replies, began to operate from May 1945, by special broadcasts from the Broadcasting Section¹.

Information received by the Central Agency was broadcast for the first time on May 2, 1945, the subject being a list of French PW in transit through Switzerland : this first "special" broadcast of the ICRC had been improvised in a few hours and was given on one of the wavelengths of the Swiss Station at

¹ Since it was started in March 1945, the Broadcasting Section has made regular broadcasts on Swiss medium and short wavelengths, giving general information relating to Red Cross work, either independently or in connection with programmes of the Geneva Radio Station ; it also transmitted the special broadcasts here mentioned.

Sottens. Following on this experiment, the Swiss Federal authorities, as an exception, allocated a special short wavelength to the ICRC, and re-transmission was ensured from Prangins and Schwarzenburg Stations. The period of these broadcasts was extended by degrees to twelve hours a day, Saturdays and Sundays included ; they were made according to the subject matter, in seventeen different languages, and according to a carefully arranged time-table.

The Swiss Federal broadcasting authorities and the " Radio-Genève " Company granted the ICRC the use of all the technical installations required (studio and equipment, telephone lines and transmitters), free of charge, the actual programmes being carried out by the ICRC.

The first transmissions were made under the signal " Radio Caritas ", afterwards changed to " Intercroixrouge ". The lists of names and the messages being sent out were read in turn by two speakers, a man and a woman, in the language of those whose names or messages were broadcast, at an average rate of 150 names an hour, or in a day of 12 hours' transmission, about 1,800 names.

These special broadcasts of the ICRC were picked up in the countries concerned (France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, etc.), either by private listeners, or by the National Red Cross Societies or their local branches. As the Swiss postal authorities had placed a telephone cable to the Austrian frontier at the disposal of the ICRC, the broadcasts for Austria could be relayed over the whole network in that country, comprising thirteen short-wave stations.

In addition to the broadcasting of information and messages for relatives in various countries, a weekly service was set up for the benefit of certain delegates of the ICRC, who could not be reached by post without long delays, for instance, in Vienna, Prague, Budapest, Belgrade, Rome and Naples ; by this means, it was possible to send information and instructions.

The broadcasting of information was not intended by the ICRC to take the place of communications to the official Information Bureaux as provided by the 1929 PW Convention. It was merely a rapid means of reaching next of kin, when official

Bureaux were difficult to notify, as in the Balkan States, or no longer existed, as in the case of Germany and Austria. The National Sections were still bound to send their communications to the official Bureaux in the prescribed way. Indeed, unless acknowledged in the form of a monitored text of the programme, it is not possible to verify that a broadcast has reached those concerned, and a faultless transmission cannot be guaranteed. Moreover, the limited output of a broadcasting service (150 names an hour, or 3,600 in a twenty-four hour day for one station), greatly reduced the scope of this means of communication. It was therefore necessary to make a selection of the documents received by the Agency. In each Section, one member of the staff was entrusted with the choice of the documents suitable for broadcasting.

These consisted usually of lists of names, above all of PW, mainly German and Italian, who were still held in the camps, and of "dispersed" civilians (adults or children) of many nationalities. At first, the names of PW and internees repatriated through Switzerland were also broadcast.

Lists which were clearly drawn up and classified in alphabetical order were broadcast in their original form and card-indexed afterwards. Other lists were first card-indexed and the names read out at the microphone from the cards placed in alphabetical order. The longest list, received in August 1945 from the delegation in Northern Italy, contained 132,000 names of German PW in the area of Rimini.

Mention should also be made of the lists of "dispersed" children, chiefly German and Austrian, received from the delegations of the ICRC at Bayreuth and Linz. The names and addresses were broadcast for the benefit of the parents, also "dispersed", who had been searching for them until then without success.

Besides the lists mentioned above, the Central Agency also broadcast the contents of a great number of capture cards.

Individual applications for search received in great number by the Central Agency were also broadcast; full particulars of the person for whom the search was being made were read out, together with the address of the applicant.

Family messages from French civilians and native workers in France were also broadcast to their families in Indo-China : the messages from the native workers were broadcast in Annamese.

From May 1, 1945, to June 30, 1947, the special broadcasts of the ICRC reached a total of 4868 hours, and included the reading of some 570,000 names.

VI. GENERAL AUXILIARY SECTIONS

The rapid growth of the work of the Central Agency made it necessary, from 1940 onwards, to relieve the pressure in some sections by handing over "spade work", such as making out cards and the preliminary sorting, to staff teams whose services were at the disposal of all Sections. In this manner a number of services were set up under the name of General Auxiliary Sections : they included the *Typing Section*, *Preliminary Sorting Section* together with the *Evening Section*, the *Auxiliary Sections* and *Outside Work*.

(i). *Typing Section*

This Section was set up in the early summer of 1940, when lists of information on French and Belgian PW started arriving at the Central Agency and the information had to be transcribed on to cards. From the beginning, the Section was formed of typists who made out the cards and a team of assistants who checked the cards with the original documents.

The Typing Section grew rapidly—by the end of 1940, there were 100 typists and 150 checkers, the latter voluntary workers. The work done by these volunteers corresponded to that of about 50 members of the permanent staff. The pressure of work during 1941 and 1942 was so great that it was found necessary to set up an auxiliary section in a neighbouring town with a dozen typists employed on the same work as the teams at Geneva.

The Typing Section was organized with the intention that it should be a pool where all the cards for the indexes of the

Central Agency could be made. However, information arrived in such masses that the Typing Section inevitably got into arrears in the delivery of the cards to the National Sections. In order to gain time, these Sections started making out their own cards, transcribing on to them the details in which they were particularly interested. They did this in the way best suited to their needs, and the result was lack of uniformity in the cards.

A great part of the staff of the Typing Section had, therefore, to be drafted to the National Sections. The Section still survived, however, in a modified form; only work of an urgent nature was assigned to it. The Section retained a permanent staff of 10 to 12 persons for "carding" documents requiring immediate attention and for copy work. It served also as a training centre for Agency typists, where beginners were sent before being drafted to the various Sections. Except for a few permanent members, the staff in this Section was constantly renewed, and the permanent staff was often called upon to help other Sections.

During the course of 1942, a Roneo Section was added to the Typing Section, for duplicating forms, reports, technical notes and other documents required in the Agency.

Up to June 30, 1947, the Typing Section, in addition to other work, had made out 5,557,476 cards; since the summer of 1945, it has been almost entirely engaged on making out cards for the German Section.

(2). Preliminary Sorting Section and Evening Section

The work of the Preliminary Sorting Section was the putting of index and capture cards into alphabetical order for insertion in the card indexes. That had to be done necessarily when a batch of cards was especially large; it was the natural corollary to the making out of the cards.

The Section was started in 1940, early in the year, and by June its work had considerably increased, owing to the arrivals in great numbers of lists and capture cards of French and Belgian

PW. The work accomplished by this Section always corresponded with the fluctuations of the work being done by National Sections. From the summer of 1945, it was principally employed in sorting cards and capture-cards for the Axis Sections.

Cards were first sorted by nationality. The next stage was a sorting by the first letter of the names, again by the second, then by the third and then came a final sorting. Sorting by first, second and third letters was done in three separate stages and by different persons ; the work was almost mechanical and did not require any special skill. The final sorting, however, from the fourth letter, usually done by one particular person called for more care and accuracy, and especially experience.

At first the Preliminary Sorting Section did the work of alphabetising for all sections, leaving the National Sections to make any merging or phonetic adjustments they had decided to adopt, before placing the cards in the index. At a later date the Section was, however, obliged to follow certain filing rules adopted by various Sections, in particular the German, Hungarian, Rumanian and Yugoslav Sections, where frequent phonetic merging, adapted to the peculiarities of the language of these countries, modified the strict alphabetical order. The staff had therefore to be familiar with this variety of filing methods, and that was not always a simple matter. Other members of the staff had to learn the Russian alphabet in order to sort cards for Soviet personnel.

Before the Preliminary Sorting Section came to an end in 1946, it had handled nearly 32 million cards. Several years' experience had shown that the average time taken by a trained sorter to alphabetise a thousand cards is four hours. Except for a few permanent salaried employees, the staff in this section was always composed of voluntary workers.

In 1940, a section in line with the Preliminary Sorting Section Section was organized and known as the Evening Section. It was under the same direction and was served entirely by voluntary workers (for the most part employees, tradesmen and workmen) who gave a few hours of their spare time in the evening to the Red Cross. This Section handled all sorts of urgent work, in particular preliminary sorting for National Sections.

The average attendance was about 40 persons every evening. Until it was closed in April 1945, the Evening Section had, besides other work, made out 250,000 cards, sorted 5 million, and transcribed 200,000 messages and communications to next of kin.

(3). *Auxiliary Sections*

When the Central Agency opened in September 1939, unsolicited offers of help were received from many towns in Switzerland. When therefore, following military events in the summer of 1940, the Agency was faced with an average of 60,000 letters a day, the ICRC realized that Geneva unaided could not cope with the task and recalled these offers for possible use. That led to the organization of the Auxiliary Sections.

An appeal was made which met with an enthusiastic response. The idea of making a contribution to the work undertaken at Geneva could not fail to rouse the entire sympathy of the Swiss people who, during the recent war, felt very keenly that it was their duty to help the victims of the war. Thus, the Agency which, in 1914-1918, had carried on the whole of its activities in Geneva and Copenhagen, distributed work throughout the whole of Switzerland during the second World War.

From May to November 1940, the first sections were set up in Zurich, Lucerne, Vevey, Aarau, Neuchâtel, Berne, Basle, Nyon, Trélex (Nyon), Morges, St. Gall, Lausanne, Winterthur, Yverdon, Montreux, Fribourg, Chur, Troinex (Geneva), Zug, as well as on the premises and with the help of the staff of the Swiss Banking Corporation.

In 1941, the continued growth of the Central Agency, and of the Italian Section in particular, made further efforts necessary. New sections were therefore opened at Lugano, Locarno, Bellinzona, Poschiavo, St. Moritz, Rolle, Mont-sur-Rolle, Le Locle, Chernex (Montreux) and Bulle. Later, further sections were opened in 1942 at Mendrisio, and in 1944 at Sion, Sierre, Chippis and La Chaux-de-Fonds.

The time came when some of these sections, after several years of hard work, had to close down. In this connexion, it

should be mentioned that in Geneva, several business houses and associations had, from the outset, lent their services to the Central Agency.

These Auxiliary Sections, as will have been seen, varied in number during the war. There were 24 in 1945, which assembled on an average 1060 regular voluntary workers. Whilst the war went on, only Swiss nationals could be admitted to them.

Eight Sections, accounting for 669 members were in the German-speaking Cantons ; 330 members worked in Zurich and the remainder in Aarau, Basle, Berne, Lucerne, St. Gall, St. Moritz and Winterthur.

Eleven Sections, with 301 members, were in the French-speaking Cantons, at Bulle, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Chippis, Fribourg, Lausanne, Montreux, Neuchâtel, Sierre, Sion, Vevey and Yverdon.

Five Sections with a total of 90 members were in the Italian-speaking cantons at Bellinzona, Locarno, Lugano, Mendrisio and Poschiavo.

From the opening of these Sections, a great many members pursued their work with remarkable regularity and perseverance ; they gave many hours of their time every day to tasks which were sometimes very monotonous. The high output of the Auxiliary Sections is due to their steadfast efforts.

Besides these workers, evening teams were started in some of the more important outside Sections, made up of staff members from commercial firms and banks, teachers, and others. These helpers, the majority of whom were experienced office workers, met on the premises of the Section, or in offices lent by their employers, who also supplied typewriters.

This voluntary effort, kept up over several years by men and women who had already worked long hours in offices or workshops, is a proof of the renown of the work with which they wished to be associated.

In a great many cases, the running costs were met by the Sections themselves, assisted by town authorities, local societies and generous subscribers.

Although the main object of organizing Auxiliary Sections was to assist the Typing and Preliminary Sorting Sections, and

their most important work consisted in making out and sorting cards, the scope of their activities increased as their members became more experienced.

The following are some of the other types of work entrusted to their care :

Sorting letters and messages.

Transcribing letters to Civilian Message Forms.

Checking texts of Civilian Messages.

Making out labels for parcels.

Registration and transmission of documents.

Copying of various kinds.

Translations of various descriptions.

Regimental enquiries (enquiries to PW in camps for information about missing personnel).

Notification of deaths.

Précis of files concerning civilian internees and entry on cards.

From August 1940 to the end of June 1947, the Auxiliary Sections made out 19,997,000 cards, filed 1,235,0000 and sent out over a million communications. The other items above-mentioned, which sometimes involved long and exacting work, totalled over ten millions.

A perfect knowledge of German and Italian, and a good working knowledge of many other languages, enabled certain Sections to be of assistance to a particular National Section. Translations in Dutch, Czech, Hungarian, Rumanian, Bulgarian, Russian, Lithuanian, Finnish and Scandinavian languages, Turkish, Arab, Chinese and Japanese were a daily feature of their work. The Zurich Section was specially proficient in languages.

The various Auxiliary Sections enjoyed a certain independence in regard to their internal organization, but all general questions were dealt with by the Auxiliary Sections Office at the Central Agency. This office also acted as intermediary between the National Sections and Auxiliary Sections for the distribution of work, and its return to the Agency. Further, one person in

each National Section was in charge of work sent out to Auxiliary Sections.

The Auxiliary Sections Office received from the National Sections the work for the Auxiliary Sections, with a covering list of the documents which required attention, and for which they were responsible.

Any work which had had some unusual feature was accompanied by explicit instructions from the National Section concerned, and to each new case was attached a model to indicate the treatment required. Great stress must be laid on the extreme importance of instructions and models ; the latter were indeed indispensable for good output by the Auxiliary Sections.

When work was finished it was sent back to the Auxiliary Sections Office in Geneva and handed to the National Sections.

The Auxiliary Sections Office used the "Cardex" system to keep a careful check on all work sent out to Sections and on its return. Its index allowed it to be seen at a glance how work was progressing in each Section.

Each Section checked its own work. In general, the National Sections were not in direct contact with the Auxiliary Sections and had to send all comments or criticism regarding work returned to the Auxiliary Sections Office, which was thus able to judge the general quality of the work done by the various teams, and to plan the distribution of work accordingly.

In the course of time, the output of the Auxiliary Sections showed marked improvement ; a great many helpers became as experienced and methodical as professional staff. It should be observed that as the Agency, under pressure of events, grew in extent and scope, the work required of these teams became more varied, complex and urgent. Their members applied themselves with patience and assiduity to a task which continued to increase, and they accomplished it to the entire satisfaction of the head office.

(4). Outside Work

The Auxiliary Sections, by the autumn of 1945, had reached the peak of their working capacity, and no more staff was available at Geneva. The Central Agency was therefore obliged

to set up, in Switzerland and the neighbouring parts of France and in agreement with the authorities concerned, teams of helpers composed of military internees, civilian internees and German PW.

From September 20, 1945, eleven of these Branches were working in Switzerland, and one in France, as from March 14, 1946. These teams were intended primarily to help the German Section, the work of which had grown considerably with the end of the war. The main lines of their work were :

- Sorting mail from German PW to their next of kin ;
- Making out information and enquiry cards ;
- Preliminary filing of cards ;
- Transmission of messages to prisoners or internees ;
- Communicating information to families ;
- Translation of documents into various languages.

The work of these Branches was, as in the case of Auxiliary Sections, controlled by an administrative office of the Central Agency, called the Outside Work Office, which directed the distribution of work to the Branches and its return to the Agency. No messages or communications were sent direct from Branches to families.

From September 1945 to June 1947, the Branches worked 612,697 hours, corresponding to the average attendance of 174 regular workers at the Central Agency. During this same period, members of these sections produced 14,891,000 letters, messages or cards.

Also, from September 1945 to June 1946, over six million PW letters and cards were sorted according to occupation zones and postal districts.

Such high output could only be attained by intensive standardization of working methods, and careful checking by the Branches themselves greatly contributed to the quality of the work they accomplished.

VII. CARD-INDEXES

(I). *General Remarks*

In order to perform adequately the duties of a bureau to supply information, it was necessary for the Central Agency to have a record of the names of all PW and civilian internees, about whom information had been received or applications made. For this purpose, all applications were transcribed to filing cards of uniform size which were filed in alphabetical order and formed the card-index. The coming together of information and application cards within the index—so-called “tallies”—made it possible to supply the applicants with the information required.

It was decided, for reasons primarily of language, to make separate indexes for each National Section. This system allowed the principle of alphabetical filing to be adapted to the various languages, and even to the various alphabets, which would have been far more difficult with a joint index.

Although the principle of alphabetical filing has not varied in the course of years, the methods, features and use of filing cards have changed to some degree.

In the International Agency of 1914 to 1918, and at the beginning of the 1939 Central Agency, card-indexes were used simply as a name index or reference. Cards bore only the prisoners' names, the data for identification and the reference number of the original documents. Thus, when communicating information to applicants, these documents had to be consulted in every instance. Experienced staff, working with all due

caution, examined each case before transferring information concerning the case in point to the enquiry cards.

This system, which in some respects may appear more strictly accurate, could only be usefully applied when the number of cases to be examined was comparatively small. When mail arrived in great quantities, however, systematic reference to the documents required too much time and space. It was, therefore, found necessary, in face of the sudden influx of enquiries in 1940, to change the method of using the index card. Instead of serving simply as a means of reference, it became a record of information : it bore not only the name of the man concerned, the essential data for identification, and the reference to the original document, but also the information properly so-called (notification of capture, death, etc.), contained in the said document. From that time, the card-index ceased to be an alphabetical reference and became to some extent a duplicate of the records of any given Section, thus avoiding the need to consult original documents on each occasion. Every possible care was taken for the literal transcription of the original, when making out the information cards. No doubt, the necessity of carefully copying all the data entailed considerable work, but this method allowed the task to be split up and dealt with by several teams at the same time.

A further important innovation in the use of the card-index was the filing in the latter of original documents which, just as the capture-cards and standard application forms, were filled in by the senders on forms of the same size as the index-cards.

By these devices, the card-index became the essential working instrument of the National Sections, and a general record of information on all cases dealt with.

(2). *Equipment*

(A). *Cards.*

The index-card was the exact copy of the original document, and the Agency kept strictly to this rule. Since the work was based on the cards and not on the original documents, it was

necessary that the first should be a true picture of the second. Even when names appeared to be mutilated, they were copied as written, any such errors being usually put right by the rules which were applied when the cards were filed.

As already mentioned¹, the cards were made out by the Typing and Auxiliary Sections. In urgent cases, or in those which required experience, the National Sections often typed their own cards.

In order to make the research and other work easier, it was soon found necessary to adopt a standard size for all cards. The practice was not, however, made general for the whole Agency, and each Section was left free to employ whatever system seemed best for its special needs.

The Agency of 1914, and that of 1939 at the outset employed cards measuring 8 by 12½ cm. (3 by 5 in.) ; these were filed upright.

In 1940, on receiving the first capture-cards from Germany which measured 10 by 15 cm. (4 by 6 in.), it was decided to replace all the cards in the Agency by cards of this size, in order to file the capture-cards straight away in the index. Cards were now filed lengthwise². The same size was afterwards adopted for all standard application cards, which could thus also be filed immediately in the index.

Two wholly different systems may be used for filing information received at various times and concerning the same person. The first method consists of making out a fresh card on each occasion, thus forming a batch of cards for each person. The other is to record successive data on a single card, which may be described as a "composite" or "key" card.

The Central Agency adopted the first method, as the only means of keeping its index comparatively up to date. In this way, the typing of the cards could be handed over to the many Auxiliary Sections which worked for the Agency in various towns in Switzerland. Moreover, the information received by

¹ See pp. 86 sqq.

² With the exception of the American Section, which used the Watson Cards. See p. 265.

the Agency was frequently mutilated or incomplete, which made filing difficult. The use of batches, whilst leaving the information received in its original form, enabled the filing staff to detect errors more easily than the use of "key cards".

It is a fact that "key cards" take up less space than batches, and considerable time is saved in checking. For this reason, certain National Sections¹ gave the system a trial when it became imperative to reduce the staff.

Preliminary checking is required to make out "key cards" and keep them up to date. Before the card is typed, a check must first be made to establish if a duplicate card already exists, in which case this must be taken out of the index to be completed. A loss of time occurred in both cases, especially when original lists were not established in alphabetical order and cards then had to be typed before checking. As the trials did not prove satisfactory, the idea of adopting this system for the Agency card-indexes was abandoned.

The information cards varied in colour according to the Sections; enquiry cards for the whole Agency were always white; the liaison cards were grey.

The liaison cards were the exact copies of information or enquiry cards and were made out whenever any doubt existed as to a person's nationality, or when a man had served in other units than those of the regular forces of his country. The Section dealing with the case kept the original card, a liaison card being sent to all other Sections concerned.

Some Sections applied a key card system by abolishing duplicates. In this method, when two or more cards giving similar information for a particular person were found in the index, a transfer of the references was made to one single card, and the others destroyed.

Other Sections partly adopted a key card system by placing the essential data on one card, and less important details on separate cards.

¹ Amongst others the British and Italian Sections.

(B). *Accessories.*

The cards were filed in open cardboard filing boxes which were 16 cm. wide, 8 cm. high and 37 cm. long ($6\frac{1}{2}$ by $3\frac{1}{2}$ by 25 in.), bearing interchangeable labels, affixed in front and indicating the alphabetical division.

The boxes were placed on standard shelving. Four types of shelving were in use for the Agency card-index; that in most common use was 155 cm. wide, 105 cm. high and 32 cm. in depth (62 by 42 by 13 in.). The shelving was placed on tables wide enough to work on, or set on the ground in double tiers, which economised a great deal of space ¹.

For card-index work various accessories were used (clips or elastic bands, hinge-clips, marker-cards).

The clips or elastic bands were used to hold the batches of cards concerning the same person. Although their use made the work much easier, they added much to the total bulk of the index, and had to be given up when it became necessary to gain space by all means. This was the case for the boxes put aside, e.g. the French index for the Battle of France in 1940, and for those which were no longer in actual use after the war had ended.

The hinge-clips were used for holding the cards in place in the boxes; experience showed that boxes should only be two-thirds, or at most three-quarters full, to work with ease.

The marker-cards (also called flags) which bore tabs with inscriptions to help alphabetical filing, were inserted into the boxes to make research easier. The contents of the boxes were thus divided in groups of 100 to 200 cards.

(3) *Working Methods*

The card-index, which was the real centre of each National Section, formed a self-contained unit. The output and efficiency of the Sections depended to a great degree upon its due working.

¹ In the latter case, the lower part was not so high and included a sliding shelf, to serve as table.

(A). *Staff.*

The personnel of each card-index included :

(a) The *senior assistants*, who distributed and supervised the work, trained new personnel and did statistical work.

(b) The *filings clerks*, each in charge of an alphabetic sector and responsible for boxes being in good order and kept up to date. Each filing clerk was given an approximately equal number of individual cases to handle, and consequently of boxes. The number of boxes was reduced, however, when the work was particularly difficult, for instance, in sectors comprising very common surnames, such as Smith, Martin, Muller, and so forth.

(c) The *controllers*, who were usually chosen among the experienced filing clerks. A sector was allotted to each, and this was of course more extensive than for the filing clerk. Their duty was to go through each box, to see that the rules of filing were properly observed, and cases duly dealt with. In large indexes the controllers performed no other duties : for small indexes, they also helped with the filing.

(d) The *checkers* (in all sections where the checking staff belonged to the card-index).

(B). *Filing and Research Work.*

(a) *Distribution of work.* — When a number of cards had been assembled, the placing in alphabetical order was effected by a separate service, the Preliminary Sorting Section¹.

A distinction was made between cards giving fresh information, taken from original documents and being filed for the first time (known as "moisson" or "harvest"), and those which were sent back to the card-index after having been taken out for reference by the Sections (known as "return cards").

¹ See p. 87.

The National Sections usually gave filing priority to certain batches of "harvest" which had to be dealt with urgently—e.g. capture-cards, which were of course handled before notices of transfer, or other data concerning PW who were already indexed.

When the cards had been placed in alphabetical order by the Preliminary Sorting Section, they were handed to the national card-indexes, where a filing clerk divided them into lots corresponding to the alphabetical sectors.

In large Sections, the allocation of work to the filing staff had to be centralized. The cards were placed in boxes bearing the names of the personnel concerned, who collected the cards every morning and brought back in the evening the surplus which had not been dealt with. This method allowed the senior assistants to see at a glance how the work was progressing and to take any action required.

It was ascertained that the ordinary filing clerk could on an average file 300 cards per day. This figure was generally less for the more difficult alphabetic sectors.

As regards controlling, this varied greatly according to the Sections concerned ; the number examined by each controller ranged between one to five boxes per day. To be thorough, this work required a large staff, so that the filing clerks had sometimes to be called upon to help the controllers.

(b) *Filing Rules.* — We have seen that the filing was based on the alphabetical order of the prisoners' surnames and first names.

In practice, however, certain exceptions had to be made to strict alphabetical filing. Surnames can be written in very many ways. If the filing clerks had strictly observed the alphabetical order, cards for the same persons would not all have been filed together, and a great many "tallies" would have been missed. To help the joining up of the cards, various methods of merging were practised : phonetic, or graphic merging, and the two combined.

The following are a few examples of this method of merging in practice.

(1) *Phonetic.*

BAUDHuin, BAUDOIN, BEAUDOIN.
PEROZ, PERRAUD, PERRAULT, PERREAU, PERREAUT, PERROT,
PEYRAUD, PEYROT.
MAIER, MAJER, MAYER, MEIER, MEJER, MEYER, MAIR, MAJR,
MAYR, MEIR, MEJR, MEYR.
STEWARD, STEWART, STUART.
IRVINE, IRVIN, IRWIN, IRVING, IRWING.
WHITAKER, WHITTAKER, WHITTACKER, WHITEAKER.
SILBERSTEIN, ZILBERSTAJN (Polish phonetic version).
SZABO (original Hungarian form), SABO, SABAU, SABU (Rumanian phonetic version).

Each National Section was led to adopt its own phonetic method of merging. One practice, however, was common to all Sections, the filing of double consonants by the first letter only.

(2) *Graphic.*

BONVARD and BOUVARD.
FERRAND and FERRAUD.

This type of merging was used almost exclusively for French names.

(3) *Phonetic and Graphic.*

LEFAIBRE, LEFEBURE, LEFEBVRE, LEFEVRE.
GANTHIE, GANTHIER, GANTIE, GANTIER, GANTIES, GANTIEZ,
GAULTHIER, GAUTHIER, GAUTHIERS, GAUTHIEZ, GAUTIER.
JOHNSON, JOHNSTON, JOHNSTONE, JONSON, JONNSON, JONSSON.
CRESWELL, CRESSWELL, CRASWELL, GRESSWELL.
SIMON, SIMONS, SIMMONDS, SIMMONS.

Whenever a batch of cards was not, for some reason, filed in its proper alphabetical position, a card of a special colour was inserted in its place, called a "Reference Card", which

stated where it was to be found : thus BOUVARD being merged with BONVARD a reference slip was placed where BOUVARD should have been filed which stated " BOUVARD see under BONVARD ".

Before each group of " merged " names was placed a warning card, showing all the spellings included.

In addition to these exceptions to alphabetical filing, certain other rules had to be introduced, as follows :

Compound and double names were usually filed after the principal simple name, e.g. LEROY-BEAULIEU was filed after all the LEROY.

With regard to names preceded by a particle, the ruling was not common to all Sections ; they were filed either following the initial of the particle, or of the principal name. The French Section did not take into account the particles *de*, *De*, *d'* ; for instance, *d'ASTIER* was filed under letter A. All other particles counted, however ; thus, *la VIGERIE* was filed under L.

When only the surname was given, the card was filed in front of all those bearing the same name together with first names.

When only the initial of a first name was given, the card was filed in front of all those with first names beginning with the same letter.

If two or more first names were recorded, only the first counted for filing purposes.

In the event of two persons bearing an identical surname and first name, the filing was based on the dates of birth, the elder being usually placed in front.

The cards forming a batch were always arranged in a fixed order, which was not always the same in the various Sections. The logical method, which proved to be the best for quickly picking up the threads of a particular case, was to arrange the cards by order of date. The enquiry cards on which action was being taken were usually placed first in the batch.

(c) *Research Work.* — The work on the card-index was done both by the filing cleks and the checkers.

The work of the checkers was to start from the various

documents received by the Agency and to make the required search in the card-index. They formed a separate service in all principal Sections, which was either part of the card-index staff, or outside it, according to circumstances.

It should be specified that the filing staff did not merely insert new files into the index, but had also to keep a careful watch for any possible "tallies". Their work was therefore in some respects similar to that of the checkers; both had to bear constantly in mind the filing regulations in force, of which the most important have already been mentioned.

In each Section the removal of cards from the index was subject to general rules, two of which should be mentioned as they were of peculiar importance and applied to all departments of the Agency.

First, the various cards which formed the batch could not be separated or removed singly from the index. It was essential for the person dealing with the case to have the whole batch, and thus the whole history of the case. Moreover, a complete batch was less likely to go astray than a single card.

Secondly, all cards removed from the index had to be replaced by a "pointer", bearing all references necessary for replacing the file on its return to the index. The references had to be sufficiently clear to allow the renewal of the whole batch in case of loss, and included the date of removal from the file and the place where they could be claimed. Even if the batch had been removed from the index, the pointer gave relevant details on the case and allowed action to be taken.

With regard to the pointers, two methods were practised: either to use an outstanding slip, called the "signpost", which had to be made out on every occasion, or to provide each batch of cards with a "permanent pointer", of the same size as the cards, which was never to be removed from the index. The presence of a "permanent pointer" did not dispense the searcher who removed a file from making out a slip with the date and the name of the person responsible. The permanent pointer had, of course, to be kept up to date with all new information received on the particular case.

During the first years, "signpost pointers" only were used at the Central Agency. This system, however, involved a great deal of transcription, whenever cards were taken out of the index; not only had the pointers to show all personal data of the case, the date of the removal of the batch and the name of the person responsible, but also the reference numbers of all cards contained in the batch. When made out in a hurry by busy people, it frequently happened that details were missing, or that the text was illegible.

In consequence, some Sections were led to introduce the "permanent pointer", which bore printed headings, showed all particulars relating to the PW at the top, the remainder of the card being used to record the references of the cards contained in the batch.

Experience showed, however, that the use of this card was only advisable in large Sections, where the daily average of batches taken out of the index was fairly high. This average was in proportion to the volume of work in each Section, i.e. to the average number of data or enquiries regarding one person received within a given period. The volume of work depended upon various factors which related to the nationality of the PW concerned, e.g. frequency of transfers, each entailing a separate communication to the Agency, applications by relatives or by public or private bodies in the various countries, and so on.

Permanent pointers were only made out for cards removed from the index, thus avoiding a waste of valuable time in making out pointers for batches of cards which might never be required.

In practice, filing and checking in the index met with frequent difficulties. The data required for identification were often inadequate and names were often subject to mutilation. In such cases, the mere observance of filing rules would not have sufficed to ensure the "tally" of cards concerning the same person; both filers and checkers had then to use their utmost ingenuity to reach the desired goal.

Here are some of the difficulties created by the lack of sufficient data for identification, and the manner in which these difficulties were met.

In many cases, PW had the same surnames and first names. In order to distinguish them, certain civil and military particulars were necessary, e.g. date and place of birth, first name of father, domicile (address of next of kin), army unit, army and PW numbers.

The most important of all was certainly the army number ; this in itself allowed for the full identification of the PW in civil life, provided of course that the same number was never given to more than one man.

The system of army numbers, as used in several countries where it formed an integral part of each man's identity, and which was often quoted by relatives in their applications, rendered invaluable service to the Central Agency. The work became extremely complicated, however, in cases where this system of numbers was not in current use, or had not been adopted by certain armed forces.

The number allotted to a PW on capture was also of great assistance for this type of research.

When these various particulars were missing or incomplete, searchers had to try to make the cards correspond by piecing together data on capture and the successive places of detention that might be shown on the cards.

If this last attempt gave no result, the search was discontinued and the card put in place in the index, until the arrival of fresh information might help to throw some light on the case.

Other difficulties arose through the mutilation of names or their transliteration in other languages. The documents received at the Agency had often been dictated or copied from other documents, when errors in taking down or reading were inevitable. It also frequently occurred that the writers knew little or nothing of the prisoner's or applicant's language, which resulted in serious mutilations of names, especially in the less common languages.

Cases of this kind could of course not be foreseen, so that no fixed rulings could be made; the correction of errors in the card-index thus depended entirely upon the searcher's experience and intuition. Reference slips were made use of in these cases.

The following are a few examples of mutilation :

Correct spelling Mutilated

LUCIRA	LUCERA
BAITO	BITO
SAITO	GAITO
PLETINCKX	FLETINECK, PLETINAX, PLERTINX, PLETIVVETLX
BOEKENS	BOEGEHENS.

All these errors were the result of carelessness or ignorance. Some mutilations were, however, conscious. We may quote the case of people belonging to certain racial groups who after emigration, or compulsory or voluntary adoption of a new nationality, had, under political or cultural influence, often adapted the spelling of their names to the language of the new country. In this manner, Greek emigrants to the United States simplified or shortened their names : SAVOPOULOS became SAVAS SELLEVERDIS - VERDIS, MICHAILITSIS - MITCHELL ; some translated them, when GIANNKOPOULOS became JOHNSON, and MARANGOS became CARPENTER. Jews, particularly those of German origin, often did the same, so that NEUMANN became NEWMAN in the United States.

In such cases, the question could only be solved with the help of experts in the language and customs of the peoples concerned.

Amongst the armed forces of the British Commonwealth and the French Union there were racial groups whose language was entirely different from that of the parent State, and for these the Agency sections set up special indexes. This was the practice followed in the British Section for Cypriots, Arabs, Indian troops and South African native troops. The French Colonial Section set up separate indexes in the same way for the Arab-speaking countries (Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco), for French West Africa and Indochina.

While the setting up of special indexes simplified the problem, it was by no means sufficient to solve the linguistic difficulties involved in filing names in some languages, and the army

number, when known, remained often the sole means of identifying men whose names were liable to infinite variations. Thus, the French Colonial Section set up, in conjunction with the alphabetical index, a second index based on army numbers from which the searcher could work back to the first index.

It should also be mentioned that the Central Agency, having been allowed the use of the statistical machines of the International Business Machines Corporation, was in a position to draw up lists of prisoners in alphabetical order, by army or PW numbers, according to the needs of the Sections concerned.

Since errors in filing did not occur with the machines, the alphabetical lists thus produced showed correctly the identity of a PW whose batch of cards has been misfiled, or had gone astray in one of the national Sections.

With regard to lists by army or PW numbers, they made it possible, in the case of namesakes or of mutilated names, to add to the relevant batches any fresh information or applications received concerning any given person.

This means of identification could of course only work when all documents received at different times by the Agency for the same man bore the army and PW numbers.

The considerable work entailed in drawing up these lists was as a rule only justified in the large Sections, in so far as they were likely to be frequently consulted.

VIII. WATSON SECTION — THE USE OF THE HOLLERITH MACHINES BY THE CENTRAL AGENCY

The study of the general working methods of the Central Agency would be incomplete without special mention being made of this Section which, although entirely technical, nevertheless constituted one of the most important innovations adopted by the Central Agency in 1939.

An international firm with head offices in Geneva, the "Phoebus Company for the Development of the Lighting Industry" had in use before the war a set of statistical machines made by the International Business Machines Corporation, whose head offices are in the United States. The Phoebus Company having been obliged to shut down, following on the events of 1939, some of the directors, who realized how useful the machines would be to the Agency, which had just begun work, approached the International Committee.

On examination it was found that a number of the machines could not easily be adapted to Agency work, and the Phoebus Company placed the matter before the International Business Machines Corporation through the European branch, whose head offices were also in Geneva. It was at that point that the attention of the President of the I.B.M., Mr. Thomas J. Watson, was drawn to the matter. He understood at once its importance for relief work and made good his generous interest by cabling on October 16, 1939, to the European Branch of the I.B.M., as follows: "Donate use of machines. Recommended you give space, furnish cards and do work gratis in our office Geneva."

Six weeks after the outbreak of the war, therefore, it had been arranged in principle that the ICRC should have the use, free of charge, of this highly efficient business machinery. In the following December, the Watson Section of the Central Agency was set up, to employ the proffered machines and to begin the necessary preliminary work.

(i) *Basic Methods*

Before describing the contribution made by the Watson Section to the work of the Central Agency, a summary explanation should be given of the way the statistical machines work and what they achieve.

The machines used by the Agency were of the type invented at the end of the last century by an American, Hollerith. He was so impressed by the enormous amount of labour involved in classifying the data of the tenth census of the population of the U.S.A. in 1880, that he formed the idea of substituting mechanical means for human labour, which is slow and liable to error. His efforts finally led to the invention of the "Hollerith Machines", based on the use of cards perforated according to a code and worked by an electro-magnetic process.

By the Hollerith system, information is marked on cards by perforations at given intervals. The cards contain twelve horizontal lines and 80 vertical columns, allowing for the inscription of 80 figures or ciphers. In any of the 80 columns, each figure from 0 to 9 is punched on the same horizontal line; for instance, 0 is always punched on the third line, 1 on the fourth line and so forth. Letters are formed by punching two holes; the letter A, for example, is shown by a perforation on the third line and another on the fifth.

Numerical codes are usually employed for transcribing information to cards. This method not only compensates for the restricted number of columns, but also facilitates sorting the cards by categories. Each column of a card used for a specified object has a fixed purpose; when used for the census of population, for instance, the thirtieth column of each card may be reserved for the civil status of the persons concerned.

(2) *Work of the Watson Section*

(A). *For the Central Agency.*

We must first point out that the service required by the Agency from the Hollerith machines did not correspond exactly with the purpose for which they were originally designed ; they were intended for statistical research work and accounting.

The Central Agency, indeed, was not concerned with the census of people or of categories of goods, the object of statistics, nor with the setting out of items in a balance sheet, as done in accountancy. On the other hand, it would be useful to have available, in plain language, lists of PW classified according to the requirements of the Sections, in alphabetical order or in a numerical sequence of any one of the items of identification on the cards. Therefore, if for each PW a punched card could be made out with all the useful items of identification, it would then be easy to sort these cards and make up, on the basis of this process, the lists that were required.

The Watson Section used three types of machines : *perforators*, *sorters* and *tabulators*. The first were for the punching of the cards. They were fitted with a keyboard similar to that of a typewriter. The pressing of a key would cause the punching of one or two rectangular holes, together with the printed transcription, at the top of the card, of the corresponding digit or letter.

The insertion and ejection of the card was entirely automatic ; the mechanism of perforation, set in motion by pressing a key, was itself electric. Lastly, by means of a special device, data common to an entire set of cards, e. g. nationality, could be punched automatically.

The cards then passed through a second machine, the sorter, where they were counted and sorted, at will, in alphabetical order or in a numerical sequence of any one of the items of identification. This sorting operated as follows : a metal brush could be shifted according to the column with which the sorting was concerned ; each time it encountered a perforation, the

brush caused an electric circuit to be closed, and the current thus set up started a mechanism, which made the cards fall into the corresponding pocket.

This automatic sorting, operating at the rate of 400 cards a minute, was made on the basis of one perforation at a time. As was seen above, each digit was expressed by a single perforation and each letter by two perforations. In order to arrange a group of numbers in a numerical sequence, according to data punched in a three column field, the cards had to be passed through the machine three times: — first on the units column, then on the tens column, and finally on the hundreds column.

The sorting of a series of names each with, possibly, as many as six letters, required twelve consecutive passages of cards through the machine, corresponding to the twelve holes by which a name of six letters was indicated on the cards.

By a similar principle, the tabulating machine produced from the cards already classified by the sorter, the lists and statistical or accounting statements required. Counters could add or subtract the data indicated by the perforations, and the results were printed by the machine. The tabulator produced the text of the punched cards at the rate of 80 cards a minute.

To this set of three machines, which assured the ordinary tasks of the Section, were added various auxiliary machines. Amongst these was the *duplicator*, the purpose of which was to reproduce, omitting the corresponding printed text, the cards already perforated, and the *interpreter*, which completed the perforated cards by the automatic printing of the text. One could thus obtain, in case of need, a double set of cards.

Thus, the Watson Section was able to make out for the National Sections, lists of prisoners in alphabetical order, in numerical sequence according to army or PW number, in order of regiment, and so forth.

The alphabetical lists were used in certain cases to communicate information regarding PW to the official Bureaux or National Red Cross Societies. Moreover, the drawing up of alphabetical lists of all the names of PW to be found in a card-index, served to reveal the existence of PW whose cards, filed in the wrong place, had till then eluded search.

The numerical lists by army or PW number, proved to be an invaluable help for researches in the index. By reference to them, names mutilated or wrongly filed could be traced, thus producing "tallies" which had escaped direct search in the index.

The outstanding aid given by the Watson Machines, however, was unquestionably in the drawing up of lists of PW and missing in army unit sequence. Those lists were useful as a starting point in the regimental enquiries, already mentioned, which were undertaken by the French Section. It will be recalled that this consisted in the systematic questioning of PW on the fate of comrades in their particular unit who were reported missing. That was possible by virtue of lists of missing, according to service units, and of PW according to regiment. Only the sorting machines, dealing with 24,000 cards an hour, and the tabulators, transcribing 4,800 names in the same time, were able to make up those two types of lists. It can be said that, in this case, the machines accomplished a creative piece of work, since no team of human workers could have carried out such a considerable task quickly enough for the result to be put to effective use.

(B). *For the Relief Division.*

The Watson Section also did a series of jobs for the Relief Division, which was independent of the Central Agency. Although that important activity was not connected with the Agency itself, it should be mentioned here, since the Watson Section, from the point of view of administration, was part of the Central Agency.

The Relief Division soon found it would be necessary to have at its disposal, both for its own use and that of donors, periodical statements of stocks of goods stored on its own warehouses in Switzerland, and of inward and outward figures. The Hollerith machines, devised for statistical and accounting work, were the very means for accomplishing this work. Cards were punched from the inward and outward warehouse dockets. Those cards carried the following data: description of goods,

donors, number of packages, weight, origin, date of receipt or dispatch, consignees, and so forth.

Once made up, the cards were sorted by warehouse, then by class of goods and passed through the tabulators; these totalized entries and subtracted shipments, and showed the stock of each type of goods in each warehouse, transcribing simultaneously the indications punched in the cards. Thus, a detailed statement of incoming and outgoing stores to date was obtained.

The punched cards made up on the basis of the outward dockets made it possible to draw up statements by category and by camp of all goods consigned within a given period.

The Watson Section also produced special statements showing the movement of goods which the British and the American Red Cross Societies had placed at the disposal of the ICRC for distribution among nationals of other countries.

Besides the punched cards made up as described, from the entry and consignment dockets, others were made up from the receipts which the camp leaders returned to Geneva. These cards provided the Transit Departments of the Relief Division with statements of goods received by each camp. Those statements, when checked against the statements of consignments from the warehouses, enabled the Transit Departments to verify the safe arrival of the goods.

Copies of these various statements were regularly forwarded to the National Red Cross Societies concerned.

Finally, the Watson Section prepared various statistics for the Relief Division and summarized from 1945 goods received per year, by camp and by category.

(C). *Organization of the Watson Section.*

The Watson Section was divided into three groups, corresponding to the three stages of its work.

The first group included the staff responsible for the preparing of the work¹. It was split up into various subsections,

¹ With the exception of the preparation of the work to be done for the Relief Division. That was done by the Relief Division itself.

the counterpart of those departments of the ICRC which required the help of the Watson machines. The sub-sections drew up the code to be used for each separate piece of work and then went on to the actual preparation of the work, which included in particular the inscription of the figures of the selected code on the original documents, and the checking of the cards when they had been punched.

The second group was concerned with the punching machines. The staff working them saw to the punching of the cards from the details in the documents and according to the instructions supplied by the sub-section which made the preparation.

The third group worked the sorting machines and tabulators, as well as the auxiliary machines previously mentioned.

In the course of 1945, at the height of its activity, the Watson Section staff comprised between 70 and 80 assistants, divided as follows :

	Number of assistants	Number of machines
Managing Staff	3	—
1st Group (preparation)	40 to 50	—
2nd "	16	13 perforators 9 sorters 4 tabulators 4 reproducers 1 interpreter
3rd "	10	

Four members of this staff, including a mechanic, belonged to the International Business Machines Corporation and were kindly lent to the ICRC.

To conclude, a few figures are given below on the work of the Watson Section from 1939 to the end of 1946 :

Number of cards punched	7,515,073
Number of cards reproduced	<u>1,058,968</u>
Total of cards made up	8,574,041
Number of cards sorted	66,440,399
Number of times cards passed through the machines	315,783,076
Number of cards passed through the tabulator . .	24,462,741

PART II

NATIONAL AND SPECIAL SECTIONS

Having given an outline of the general operation of the Central PW Agency, an account in detail will follow concerning the work of each of the National and Special Sections of which it was composed. In each of these Sections the principles applied were the same, but the circumstances of the war, the characteristics of each State or of each category of war victims, caused considerable differences in their features, both in structure and development.

We shall first deal with the National Sections, in the order in which they were set up, and which roughly corresponded to the entry of belligerents into the war. We shall then discuss the Special Sections.

Polish Section

The Polish Section was set up on September 14, 1939 and was called upon, throughout its service, to deal with cases that were of great complexity owing to the vicissitudes of this country and of its armed forces during the second World War. In 1939, the whole area of the national territory was occupied. The German Government in fact held that Poland had ceased to exist as a sovereign State, which made the task of the ICRC extremely difficult. A number of Poles, however, who were living abroad or who succeeded in leaving their occupied territory, joined the Allied forces and within their ranks, or in units of their own, continued the fight against the Axis Powers, while others carried on the struggle against the occupying Power within Poland itself.

In these circumstances, the work of the Polish Section was less that of an intermediary between the belligerents for transmitting official information than that of an information bureau for individuals and private organizations. The number of applications relating to members of the forces or civilians, who both during and after the war arrived from all parts of the world, led to the submission of a very large number of enquiries to organizations of every kind.

The Polish campaign began on September 1, 1939, with the invasion by the German armies. On September 17, the Soviet forces in their turn crossed the frontiers and, on September 27, the entry of the Germans into Warsaw put an end to military operations proper.

A very large part of the Polish army was captured by the German and Soviet forces; furthermore, a considerable

number of men took refuge in neighbouring countries, where they were interned.

The Soviet Government, not being a signatory to the 1929 PW Convention, forwarded no information on Polish PW in their hands. Applications received by the Section regarding these men could therefore not be answered. Later, it seemed possible for these PW to send messages to their relatives, but this exchange of news apparently ceased after the spring of 1940.

The German Official Bureau¹, until February 1940, sent in lists of Polish members of the forces taken prisoner by the German Army, but after that date these communications ceased, and the only particulars received by the Polish Section consisted of lists of PW who where in need, which camp leaders were authorized to forward.

It was not until 1943 that the German Official Bureau began once more to send the Agency lists of Polish PW, but these referred to officers only, as most ranks had meanwhile been converted into civilian workers and given that status. Fortunately, the Polish Section was still able to undertake enquiries from the OKW or the German Red Cross in behalf of these PW and civilian workers.

As regards Polish members of the forces who had taken refuge in September 1939 in neighbouring countries², either individually or by whole units, the National Red Cross Societies furnished the Central Agency with nominal lists. Moreover, these men, anxious about their relatives who had stayed in Poland, had since October sent the Agency messages and letters from which valuable data were collected on the writers themselves. These were filed by the Section, who then saw to the transcription and forwarding of messages and letters. This particular work, which entailed too great a burden, was taken over in March 1940 by the Civilian Message Section.

¹ Army Information Bureau for Casualties and PW of the German High Command, generally known as the "OKW".

² Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Rumania, Slovakia, Sweden and Yugoslavia.

The internees did not as a rule stay for long in the countries which had received them ; the majority soon left in order to form new units in France and in Great Britain, which took up the fight once more against Germany, alongside British and French troops.

As a result of the occupation, Poland was cut off from the rest of the world. Besides the natural wish to receive and to give news felt by all those who had relatives or friends in that country, much anxiety was aroused by the arrest of numbers of Polish citizens by the occupying authorities.

In consequence, the Polish Section received a flood of applications, concerning for the most part Jewish people. The Section responded by the despatch of messages, whenever exact addresses appeared on these applications. When these referred to persons domiciled in the German zone of occupation, the messages were transmitted through the German Red Cross. It was soon considered that it would entail too great a danger to the Jewish addressees to send these messages, so the practice was abandoned. Relations with the Russian zone were far more difficult, and there were, at one time, about 100,000 applications awaiting despatch for this zone.

* * *

During the winter of 1939-1940, a large proportion of the Poles interned in other countries had, as already mentioned, reached France, in order to fight the Germans. These men, together with the Poles who were living in France, formed Polish units which, in May and June 1940, took part in the engagements in France. The Poles captured during this campaign by the German forces were considered as French PW, and their names were sent as such to the Central Agency by the OKW.

The names of Polish members of the forces who died and were buried in France were subsequently sent to the Agency by the French Ministry for Ex-Servicemen.

The place filled by Polish units in the battle formation of the French armies decided the fate of the members of those units who escaped death or captivity. Men who had fought

on the right wing of the front took refuge in Switzerland, those on the left wing got over to England, and those in the army groups of the centre made their way towards the South of France.

The Swiss Federal Commissariat for Internment and Accommodation sent the Agency lists of Polish internees in Switzerland. The case of these men, who remained in that country until 1945, caused no difficulties to the Polish Section.

The men who succeeded in reaching Great Britain either formed new Polish units in that country, or were incorporated in British units, mainly in the R.A.F. The Polish Section usually applied to the Polish Red Cross in London for data enabling it to reply to the many applications for investigation and news concerning these men.

The German Authorities treated members of these units who fell into their hands as British PW; their names therefore appeared on the lists of PW from countries of the Commonwealth which were sent by the German Official Bureau to the Agency. The case of these men was dealt with jointly by the Polish and the British Sections; applications and enquiries devolved on the Polish Section, whilst the British Section transmitted all information received concerning Poles enlisted in the forces of the Commonwealth countries, to the London Official Bureau, together with the data for British PW.

Some of the Poles who had made their way to the free zone in France, reached Algeria and Morocco by crossing Spain secretly. Some of them were arrested during this journey by the Spanish authorities and interned in the camp of Miranda de Ebro.

In the South of France and North Africa, Polish soldiers who had retreated there were rounded up in labour camps; the Section was in touch with them through the help of the Polish Red Cross in France, which had meanwhile become the Society for Relief to Poles in France (*Groupeement d'aide aux Polonais en France*).

Many of these men however escaped and joined up with the Polish troops who were fighting with the British forces or the Free French Forces.

This situation, which developed from the Battle of France, brought in a flood of applications mainly from the Polish Red

Cross in Warsaw. Owing to the wandering of Polish soldiers about Europe, it was often a most difficult matter to deal with these applications.

* * *

The war which broke out in June 1941 between Germany and the Soviet Union had considerable reactions on the Polish Section. The U.S.S.R. became in fact from that date a Power allied with Poland. In these conditions, the commander-in-chief of the Polish Forces abroad was able to conclude two agreements, in July and December 1941, with the Soviet Government, one regulating the liberation of Polish PW and their next of kin in Russia, and the other the formation in that country of a Polish army.

Subsequently, a great part of the troops in this army left the U.S.S.R., accompanied by their relatives, and were ordered to Teheran. They formed units which were to reinforce the British Army in the Middle East. From then onwards they shared the lot of the British, Dominion and American troops. They fought at Tobruk, took part in the offensive of El Alamein, and, later, in the landing in Italy, where they were responsible for a sector of the front until the end of hostilities.

Meanwhile their families had been sent, a few at a time, from Teheran to India, Kenya, Tanganyika, Rhodesia and Mexico. In 1944, the Polish Red Cross at Nairobi sent complete lists of these civilians to the Central Agency. The Polish Section acted as intermediary between the troops and their relatives in the transmission of a very great number of messages. It also, at the request of relatives in Poland, opened numerous enquiries with the Polish Red Cross in Teheran and Cairo concerning these men.

The Polish Section was thus able to deal with cases not only relating to PW and civilian internees, like the other National Sections, but also with a very great number of cases concerning members of the forces and free civilians who had been deported or displaced as a result of the war.

Whereas in most of the other National Sections almost all enquiries concerned PW or internees, made by applicants

usually living in their ordinary place of domicile, in the Polish Section as many applications for news came from civilians who had remained in Poland as from PW, from members of the forces on active service abroad and civilian refugees in many countries. This complicated the Section's task to an appreciable degree. The lack of a central official Information Bureau greatly increased the difficulties of Poles separated by the war in tracing their relatives.

* * *

In 1944 the Russian offensive against the German forces took on a far greater extension. Polish troops, consisting of men who for various reasons had not left the U.S.S.R. in 1941 with their comrades, took part in this offensive. These men formed the nucleus of the new Polish army which grew as the national territory was liberated.

At the end of June 1944, when Russian forces arrived in the outskirts of the Polish capital, whose population at that time numbered 1,300,000, the Warsaw rising broke out, one of the most tragic episodes of the war. After desperate fighting between Poles and Germans, the insurgents were forced to capitulate in October 1944. A considerable part of the population was killed during these events, and some 20,000 members of the Polish underground army, including numerous women combatants, were taken prisoner.

The OKW did not transmit the names of these PW to the Central Agency, but in many cases camp leaders supplied lists. Moreover, prisoners themselves wrote to the Agency to report themselves and to ask that next of kin should be informed, or search made for them ; in most instances, too, they asked for relief.

Meanwhile, the German occupying forces had evacuated the remainder of the civil population from Warsaw, now entirely destroyed. The inhabitants were gradually reassembled in Pruszkow (Warsaw district), whence the able-bodied were sent to Germany to work, whilst others, such as children and old people were scattered throughout Poland. These displace-

placements of the population caused a great influx of applications for news from relatives and friends. Those concerned also sent the Central Agency a great number of requests from Germany for relief supplies. On the basis of these requests the Polish Section drew up lists and passed them on to the Delegation of the Polish Red Cross in Geneva, who was thus enabled to send foodstuffs through the intermediary of the Relief Department of the ICRC.

In the autumn of 1944, postal communications with Poland were suspended and the Agency sent messages intended for that country through the intermediary of the Union of Polish Patriots in Teheran.

In 1945, the Central Committee of the Polish Red Cross was definitely reorganized in Warsaw, whilst the Polish Red Cross in London ceased to bear this title¹. As the extensive data in the possession of the Polish Red Cross in London, including the largest existing card-index on Poles abroad, had not been sent to Warsaw, where the Red Cross files had been completely destroyed during the rising, the Polish Red Cross in Warsaw found itself unable to reply to many applications. Applicants therefore turned to the Central Agency, which served to prolong the work of the Polish Section.

The Agency, which had copies of the documents it had forwarded to the Red Cross in Warsaw and of the original documents it had received from them, had copies made of these papers for that organization, thus helping it to once more build up its records.

* * *

The ending of hostilities did not, for many reasons, put a stop to the work of the Polish Section. For one thing, a number of Poles were unable to return home, owing to various causes ; this applied to part of the ex-prisoners and deportees in Germany, to a large number of members of Polish units who had fought with the Allied forces, and to civilian refugees in various

¹ This Society later took the name of " Relief Society for Poles ". The Cairo branch, however, continued under the name of the Polish Red Cross.

countries. In the second place, the break-down of postal communications between certain countries, which continued long after the war, resulted in the large number of Poles in those countries being completely cut off, and the Central Agency alone was able to help them. It was, therefore, again to the Agency that these people applied, in order to resume or simply maintain contact with their relatives. In the third place, the fact of captivity in Allied hands or that the majority of Poles recruited by force to the German army were missing since the fighting, caused a considerable flow of applications to reach the Agency after the end of the war¹. Furthermore, the Polish Section was called upon to draw up numerous certificates of captivity and to undertake steps to secure death certificates. Finally, it still received a large number of applications concerning the disappearance of prisoners and deportees whose fate, it must be feared, will never be known².

The maximum number of staff employed in the Section was twenty-five.

¹ Some of these men deserted to join the Allied forces, and as relatives were in most unaware of this, search was extremely difficult.

² The Polish Section was frequently asked to undertake enquiries concerning missing members of the army fighting with the Soviet forces; as there was no means of taking action in this matter, such requests were simply forwarded to the Polish Red Cross in Warsaw.

French Section¹

The French Section was opened on September 14, 1939. In the history of the Central Agency, it occupies a particular place, as being the first of the major Sections in point of time. The trend of military operations in May and June 1940, followed by the Franco-German armistice of June 22, led to the greater part of the French army falling into German hands; within a few weeks more than 1,700,000 men were taken prisoner. The sudden influx of capture cards and of German official lists abruptly laid a gigantic task upon the Agency, whose departments were then still rudimentary. Within the space of six months, from May to November 1940, the staff of the French Section had to be increased from a mere ten to several hundred persons.

Through stress of circumstances, the French Section served in a sense as a testing ground for the Central Agency. Working methods, which conditions led the Section to adopt on a large scale, were often applied later in other Sections of the Agency.

Up to the summer of 1941, the French Section was extremely active. It was only then that it finished the task of communicating and recording on cards the particulars received in Geneva as a result of the Battle of France, and that it was able to make considerable reductions in staff. But many other tasks had still to be fulfilled, such as the search for the missing and countless enquiries concerning French PW in Germany. The operations in which the Free French Forces under General de Gaulle were engaged, and the existence of troops outside the

¹ See also pp. 208 sqq.

home country, but under the orders of the Vichy Government, brought in their wake fresh work for the French Section.

For the sake of clarity, we shall consider separately the two great series of events which mark the history of France during the second World War : (1) the campaign of 1939-1940 and its consequences ; (2) the constitution of the Free French forces. These two divisions, covering the period 1939-1944, are followed by a third, dealing with (1) the national liberation, (2) the repatriation of PW and other war victims, and (3) post-war work.

Following on the establishing, in the summer of 1940, of the French Committee of National Liberation by General de Gaulle in London, and the entrance upon the scene of the armed forces recruited by that Committee, the French Section had to deal simultaneously with two sets of French authorities.

In France itself, the official Government departments with which the French Section had to work, repeatedly changed their directorate, style and headquarters. Matters concerning PW were not centralized in a single official Bureau. The Central Agency forwarded lists of PW to the *Service des prisonniers de guerre* in Lyons¹, which was subordinate to the Secretary of State for War. Death notices of PW were sent to the *Service central de l'état civil, des successions et des sépultures militaires* in Paris, which was under the Secretary of State for Ex-Service Men. These offices were soon split up by the demarcation line which separated the occupation zone. Each of these offices had thus to open a branch in the opposite zone, and new offices were thus set up in Paris and Clermont-Ferrand.

As regards Free France, official Bureaux were successively installed in London, then in Algiers, and the French Section had to keep up constant relations with these also.

The foregoing will give a preliminary idea of the difficulties encountered by the Section, until the country was liberated.

¹ From September 1939 to May 1940, the lists had been sent to the Ministry of War in Paris ; from June to August 1940, to the Secretary of State for War in Vichy. From September 1940, they were sent to the above Service in Lyons, which had just been set up by the Vichy Government.

One of the features of the French Section throughout the war was the direct contact it maintained with the next of kin in France. In June 1940, circumstances led it — apparently for a few weeks only — to act as substitute for the official Bureaux and the French Red Cross, which were disorganized by the rapid succession of events, and to communicate direct to the French next of kin the news received about PW and the dead. This practice was never entirely abandoned ; the Section continued to correspond as frequently with the next of kin as with the Government departments. Thus, the Section was enabled to act as a humanitarian liaison office, independently of all political considerations.

I. THE CAMPAIGN OF 1939-1940 AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Military events and the capture of PW

During the first eight months of the war, the number of French combatants taken prisoner was small. The first list drawn up by the official German Bureau¹ reached the Section on October 2, 1939 ; it gave the names of eighteen combatants captured on September 9 during a reconnaissance. These particulars were sent the same day by photostat to the Ministry of War in Paris².

The small staff then working in the Section knew by heart most of the names of the PW who had been notified ; they hardly required to refer to the four boxes which then made up the French card-index. Early in May 1940, the total number of captures and deaths of combatants notified by the O.K.W. barely exceeded one thousand, to whom should be added several hundred civilian internees announced by the German Foreign Office.

¹ "Wehrmachtauskunftsstelle für Kriegerverluste and Kriegsgefangene" (Army Information Bureau for War Missing and Prisoners of War) of the Supreme Army Command, a bureau frequently referred to under the denomination "OKW".

² Later, lists were sent to the Secretary of State for War at Vichy, then to the subordinate *Service des prisonniers de guerre*, in Lyons.

This almost complete calm was suddenly broken on May 10 by the general attack of the German Wehrmacht on the Western front. The French forces had to bear the brunt of this offensive and its effects. The break-through on the Meuse and the lightning advance of the German forces led to the capture of increasing numbers of French troops, whereas the roads were thronged with civilians trying to flee before the invader. Material and moral chaos spread rapidly throughout the country. On June 5, after several days of calm on the Somme, the German attack was resumed. Paris fell on June 14, and on June 22, France signed at Compiègne the armistice convention with Germany, by virtue of which the major part of her forces were taken prisoner.

Influx of applications

The effect of these outstanding events on the French Section was practically instantaneous. Countless families were, from one moment to the next, a prey to the greatest anxiety about the fate of near relatives, military or civilian, with whom they had lost all contact. The French Government offices and the French Red Cross had neither the staff nor the organization needed to undertake at an hour's notice the immense task, which events laid upon them. In addition, most of the French agencies had left Paris and their new address was as yet unknown.

In the circumstances, the French families, many of whom still had memories of the Agency of 1914-1918, were convinced that Geneva would, sooner or later, be in a position to give them news which would relieve their fears. A flood of letters submerged the Agency during the weeks that followed. Whereas the French Section had received 3,755 letters only between September 1939 and the end of May 1940, it now had to deal with 1,047,525 from June to December 1940; of this number 358,146 arrived in August alone. To these figures should be added 221,284 standard enquiry cards, received between June and December 1940. The total incoming mail reached 60,000 items on certain days. Hundreds of mail bags crammed with

letters arrived, and the picture of these stacks of mail will long be remembered.

The Agency's equipment was still rudimentary, when it was suddenly confronted by a task on a scale rarely known to the Agency of 1914. Each letter had to be read and a corresponding card made out. If the work was to serve useful purpose, it had to be done in a relatively short space of time. Fortunately, a large number of voluntary workers were available in Geneva ; they numbered 850 in August and September 1940¹. The Auxiliary Sections which had been set up in several Swiss towns, were called upon to the fullest extent. Twelve of these Sections, comprising several hundred voluntary workers, laboured at that time almost exclusively for the French Section. The paid workers of the Section numbered 350 at the beginning of 1941.

From June 1940 to December 31, 1941, more than 774,000 letters of enquiry were transcribed on to cards. It was only by a minute subdivision of labour that such an immense task could be accomplished. The work was complicated by the fact that many of the letters included several enquiries ; besides the details needed to identify the missing, most of them supplied a mass of additional particulars, which wasted a great deal of time.

To secure the greatest possible speed and efficiency, the Agency published and printed large numbers of standard enquiry cards for missing combatants, called "Card 275". Its use became widespread throughout the war in most countries. It was also reprinted by several departmental committees of the French Red Cross, and by other associations. From June 1940 to December 31, 1941, the French Section received 621,284 of these cards.

Many applicants believed that the Agency already possessed the lists of French PW in Germany, and enclosed letters for these men. Up to the end of 1940, the Section received close on 100,000 letters, which were forwarded to the camps in Germany, as soon as the lists of PW reached Geneva.

¹ These 850 voluntary workers corresponded to about 250 persons doing a full-time eight-hour day.

Receipt of News

The first data concerning the Battle of France received by the French Section were single items sent by local branches of the French, Belgian, Dutch and Luxemburg Red Cross Societies, by various associations, and by private persons ; the PW themselves often supplied news also. These hastily established documents were as varied in appearance as in shape and size, and were often difficult to decipher ; they gave the names of PW halted for a few hours in some given place, or who were in transit camps, or marching on the roads towards Germany.

The taking of some two million men within a few weeks set the German military authorities the difficult task of communicating their names to Geneva. Owing to the vast number of men who had to be registered, it was likely that several months would elapse before the names of all French PW would be recorded at the Agency. In actual fact, the first official list of French PW connected with this campaign, giving captures made on May 15, reached Geneva by June 6 ; but lists continued to arrive until March 1941. On December 31, 1940, the lists received numbered 163,667 pages ; taking an average of eight names per page, these represented over 1,300,000 names. On March 31, 1941, practically all the names of the 1,700,000 French PW were known.

In the circumstances, the system of sending capture cards to the Central Agency, which had been launched a short time before on the proposal of the ICRC, was put to its first large-scale test and proved itself to be invaluable. These cards, of which over 900,000 reached the French Section in 1940, often brought the names of PW several months before the officials lists did so.

Gradually, as the capture cards, official lists and other data came in, the next of kin were advised direct of the capture, welfare, number and address of the PW. Applications were not awaited, and a separate information service was opened to handle this considerable piece of work. These communications were made on a printed standard card, with spaces to be

filled in. From May 1940 to July 1941, 911,159 of these cards were sent out. At the latter date, the Agency decided to stop sending these unsolicited communications, and information was supplied only when there was a "tally" in the index. It was properly supposed that all PW had by that time been able to get into touch with their relatives through the card which every PW, by virtue of the Convention of 1929, is allowed to send home, informing his family of his capture.

The unsolicited and direct communication of news to relatives practised by the French Section in 1940, did not dispense the ICRC from its duty of notifying the country of origin, i. e. the French authorities at Vichy. To give them immediate information before the arrival of the German official lists, the capture cards served to make up lists of French PW. These lists were established by the Hollerith Business Machines, which had just been provided. The first lists were handed on June 29 and July 17, 1940, to the Secretary of State for War in Vichy by representatives of the ICRC. During the autumn of 1940, the establishing of these lists was stopped. By that time, official nominal rolls arrived in large numbers from Germany, and the French authorities found sufficient data in the photostats which were sent to them.

We have said that the French Section received, by March 31, 1941, the lists of all the PW taken during the Battle of France. But lists still continued to arrive after that date. Prisoners were constantly being transferred from one camp to another in Germany, and these transfers gave rise to fresh lists.

The lists received by the French Section during the whole war totalled 525,106 pages. The lists forwarded by the O.K.W. were of a uniform pattern, very detailed and well drawn up, and constituted a valuable foundation on which to work.

Intermediary between the next of kin and the PW

Throughout the whole period of captivity, the Section served as an intermediary in many matters, between the French PW and their relatives. It did this, despite the fact that the

Vichy Government had a liaison agency in Berlin, the so-called "Diplomatic Service for PW", under Ambassador Scapini. In view of the large number of PW and the long duration of the war, this role of liaison agent entailed a great deal of work for the French Section. From 1941 on, it was in fact its chief business.

Contact with the PW was established through their spokesmen. The all-important social part which these representatives played in the camp, made them peculiarly fitted to handle PW matters of all kinds: transmission of news, often of a very personal nature, investigations and enquiries about PW, and so forth. Regular and useful contact was very soon established between Geneva and the spokesmen in most of the camps in Germany. Since 1941, they were even one of the characteristic features of the work of the French Section. The Section also made many enquiries with the camp commanders and the official German Information Bureau. Through its central PW card-index, the Bureau was able, in particular, to locate men whom the Section had lost sight of (for instance, escaped and recaptured PW).

The so-called barbed-wire complex, which lowered their morale, led some PW to give up all idea of sending news to their families, who then enquired in Geneva about them. In such cases, the Section sent to the PW's representative a double enquiry card, the reply-half of which was either given to the PW, who could reassure his next of kin himself, or was used by the spokesman to send news about him. This was a valuable means of reaching these men and rousing them from their apathy.

As time wore on, steadily increasing quantities of official documents and papers had to be sent to the camps, to be signed by PW. For this purpose, the Section opened a separate service. Close on 156,000 documents of all kinds passed through the Agency during the war: powers of attorney, allotment forms, wills, marriage declarations, bills of sale, liquidation notices, etc. The documents were assembled by the *Service des prisonniers de guerre* in Lyons and Paris, and forwarded once or twice a week to the French Section, who acknowledged the receipt of each document. The papers were sorted out according to camps, and dispatched once or twice a week in the

form of collective consignments to the camp spokesmen, with a covering list and a circular explaining how they were to be signed. After signature, the documents were sent back by the PW representative to the French Section, who in turn forwarded them to the French agencies concerned.

Amongst the documents thus transmitted were many marriage certificates. By virtue of war-time provisions published by the French authorities, a PW could sign his own marriage declarations in camp, before witnesses. The certificates bearing the signatures of the fiancées were sent from France to the French Section, which forwarded them to the camp spokesmen. The PW signed before witnesses, and the documents were returned to France through the Central Agency. The Section kept a card-index of these documents. Throughout the war, 2,570 declarations were sent to Germany, 1,820 of which led to marriages, and were returned to Geneva bearing the man's signature.

One of the chief duties of the French Section, in its role as an intermediary between PW camps and relatives, was to forward news of sick and wounded PW. Great care was paid to these; lists sent by army hospital commanders, doctors' reports, messages from the spokesmen and from fellow prisoners were given priority. When the illness did not seem serious, the particulars sent by the hospital commanders were forwarded by photostat to the *Service des prisonniers de guerre* in Lyons. If the news appeared grave, the Section notified the relatives direct by letter, to prepare them, as far as could be, for news of possible death.

Details of deaths were collected in Germany and forwarded to the Agency by the German Red Cross. This information included the death certificate proper, established on a form with the heading of the ICRC and signed by the doctor who had certified the death, and also by a witness, together with letters from chaplains, spokesmen, and fellow prisoners, describing the last moments of the deceased man and the burial service. On the grounds of these data, the French Section wrote to the next of kin a letter, which was sent with a photostat of the death certificate to the central *Service de l'Etat civil, des successions et des sépultures militaires* in Paris; this agency

notified the next of kin through the mayor of the home commune. The French Section communicated 15,140 death certificates during the war. At the request, of the *Service des prisonniers de guerre* in Lyon, a copy of the letter to the next of kin was also sent to them.

Agreements concluded in 1942 between the German and French authorities allowed PW to be "transformed" into civilian workers. The ICRC had no knowledge of the wording of these agreements, and the German authorities never supplied them with lists of these "transformed" PW. The men generally remained in the camp where they had been detained as PW, so that the spokesmen were able to continue to supply information and reply to the enquiries which the Section sent them.

Search for civilians

Side by side with enquiries about combatants from next of kin, the Section received, from the summer of 1940, a steadily increasing number of applications concerning the whereabouts of civilians. These came especially from PW in Germany. The number of French civilians whom events had driven from their homes was considerable. The Section started many enquiries through the *mairies* and the information bureaux which had been opened for refugees; but the work was extremely slow on account of the immense number of enquiries.

The French Post Office was also faced with similar difficulties. A card-index for the centralization of all possible data about the residences of displaced civilians was opened in Lyons. The post offices issued cards, on which the refugees wrote their former and present addresses. At the request of the Agency, a duplicate of each card was sent to it by the Post Office. The Section thus had available a most useful means of research which enabled it to answer a great many enquiries¹.

With references to displaced civilians, mention should be made of the many enquiries made about Alsatians and Lorrainers who had taken refuge in the south of France.

¹ As on Dec. 31, 1941, this card-index comprised over one million cards.

Search for the missing

Enquiries about military personnel who were posted missing in the course of the Battle of France were one of the principal activities of the French Section.

Very soon after that campaign, the Section had to start enquiries about combatants whom their relations believed to have been killed in the fighting in a given area. These investigations were in particular undertaken with the *mairies* of the places near which the fighting had occurred. The Section thus secured lists of the graves of combatants buried in many cemeteries in France, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Norway ; these lists included in all 5,681 names. The German military authorities also soon began sending to Geneva lists of French dead whose bodies had been found on the battle-fields during the advance of the German forces. These particulars enabled answers to be given to many relatives. A first step was thus made in the task of finding the missing.

By the end of 1940, the French Section realized that these investigations, which were somewhat haphazard, were inadequate. A systematic scheme was needed to clear up the numerous cases of men who, to all appearances, had not been captured by the enemy, but must be considered as missing. The number of applications which it had not yet been possible to answer, as no particulars had been received from Germany, increased to a striking degree. These applications had unavoidably remained in abeyance and finally exceeded 40,000—probably the actual number of missing for the French Army in 1940.

It was then decided to institute a methodical questioning on the French PW in Germany about the members of their units who could be looked upon as missing during operations. Since events were still comparatively recent, it seemed fairly likely that in many cases valuable evidence would thus be secured.

Such were the circumstances in which the French Section had recourse to the so-called “regimental enquiries”, which became one of the most original features of the Agency’s work in 1941 and 1942. The Hollerith Machines, which had just been made

available, were used to institute these enquiries¹. By this means, the following lists were established from January 1941:

(1). Lists of missing in the Battle of France, classified according to units. The lists were drawn up on the grounds of applications received in Geneva, as a result of an appeal by the ICRC published in the press and broadcasted.

(2) Lists of 570,000 French prisoners in Germany, classified according to their army units.

With the help of the Auxiliary Sections, the French Section then made out 570,000 envelopes addressed to these prisoners, each of which contained :

(a) The list of the missing in the unit to which the addressee belonged ;

(b) A circular letter calling on the PW to help, by trying to recall what had become of the missing men named in the list.

(c) A sheet of writing paper for the answer, and an envelope addressed to the Agency.

These envelopes were sent off to the camps during May 1941.

Answers began to come in very soon in large numbers. From July to December 1941, no fewer than 142,707 were returned to the French Section. Some of the answers referred to several cases, and it was possible to select from amongst them 170,000 statements which were sufficiently accurate to be of practical use.

For each missing man, the number of statements averaged from one to twenty or thirty. The value of these statements varied considerably; some were conclusive as regards facts and dates, others did not justify the drawing of conclusions, but supplied data which allowed further enquiries to be made with civil and military authorities, hospitals, etc. Some of these testimonies were accompanied by sketch plans, which

¹ See p. 108.

often showed with great accuracy the place where the missing man had fallen, or was buried.

Copies of the statements were made for the next of kin, the *Service central de l'Etat-civil militaire* in Paris, and the French Red Cross. All the statements were forwarded by the Section to these two agencies, but only those which supplied wholly reliable evidence were communicated to the relatives. When the statements were liable to cause needless pain, the Section wrote a personal letter, which softened the blow as much as possible.

Study of the 170,000 statements forwarded by the Central Agency enabled the French military authorities to clear up the circumstances in which over 30,000 men were missing¹. The number of the missing being 40,000 as was said, the cases which it was not possible to clear up were reduced to about ten thousand.

The "regimental enquiries" occupied an average of 60 workers at the French Section for over a year. This task produced some of the best results recorded at the Agency, and was one of the most interesting.

Independently of the "regimental enquiries" proper, the French Section started other enquiries, to ascertain the facts about missing service-men. This was the case in particular after the battles of Dunkirk and Narvik. The enquiries were carried out in liaison with the British and Norwegian Red Cross Societies.

* * *

During the whole period (June 1940 - November 1942) in which France was cut by the demarcation line, which was the boundary of the occupation zone, the Agency itself sorted the mail according to zones, with a view to accelerating the postal service to France. The forwarding of letters was done through different channels, according to each zone. As regards the

¹ In 23,000 of these cases, the wording of the statements enabled the facts to be clarified; in about 7,000 cases further search carried out by the French authorities on these grounds enabled conclusive evidence to be gathered.

Departments crossed by the demarcation line, directories indicated to which zone specific places belonged. Any error in forwarding entailed long delays in delivery, as the mail from abroad was not sent from one zone to another in case of mistake, but returned to the sender.

II. FROM THE BATTLE OF FRANCE IN 1940 TO THE ALLIED LANDING IN 1944

The creation of the Free French Committee in London in June 1940, following on the call made by General de Gaulle, and the enlistment of Free French Forces, were soon to place the French Section before a new situation. There were henceforth two French Governments, one in Vichy, and another in London ; although in opposition, they had, or might have French nationals held prisoner in the same detaining State : Germany.

In the course of 1941, the work of the French Section in connection with the Battle of France was gradually wound up, and for reasons of convenience, it was decided to assemble in a new card-index the data and applications relating to all the operations where French forces were engaged after the armistice of June 1940.

Enquiries for Seamen

As a result of the signature of the Franco-German armistice, warships of the French Navy were interned in Great Britain and in Alexandria (Egypt). Likewise, a certain number of ships of the French merchant marine were interned by Great Britain, or took refuge in neutral ports. The relatives of many sailors of these ships applied to the Agency for news ; but the applications which reached the French Section did not, of course, mention the places where the vessels were interned.

With a view to assembling all the data concerning the Navy, the merchant marine and their crews, a separate card-index was opened in the French Section. By enquiries made of Allied

or neutral authorities, and of the Committee's delegations abroad, and by various methods of counterchecking, the Section was able to collect data concerning 1,500 French ships. Mention should also be made of the voluminous correspondence between the Section and the Maritime Prefectures of Toulon and Brest.

Syrian Campaign

In June and July 1941, the campaign in Syria saw French forces engaged on both sides. Military personnel belonging to the units which had been sent out by the Vichy Government were captured by the British forces, who did not forward their names to the Agency. These men, with very few exceptions, were not considered as prisoners of war ; as soon as they were taken, they asked to enlist in the French units which were being built up in the Middle East and in Great Britain. Moreover, as the British authorities in the Middle East and the French representatives in Cairo avoided giving any precise answers to the enquiries which they received about these men, the French Section in turn was practically unable to supply information to applicants. Many applications came from the " Directorate of the Levant Forces " at Arles, with which the French Section kept up a large correspondence.

The Battle of Bir-Hacheim

It was at the battle of Bir-Hacheim on June 11, 1942, that French forces under French command were first engaged in operations in North Africa. As a result of urgent steps by the ICRC, the Italians treated the French soldiers taken at this battle as PW and not as " francs-tireurs ". The men were first of all assembled at Tobruk, and then conveyed to Italy. The ship carrying them, the *Nino Bixio*, was torpedoed off the Greek coast ; although she did not sink, many PW, including numerous French, were drowned while attempting to swim to shore. No detailed list had been drawn up when the men embarked, and the names of the survivors were not carefully noted when they landed ; the French Section was therefore at a

loss to supply information on the missing. Later, however, it succeeded in making contact with the leader of the French PW on board the vessel ; when this man escaped from Italy to Switzerland in September 1943, he was able to furnish the Agency with the names of most of the missing, thus enabling news to be sent to relatives who lived in uncertainty for over a year. This is a good illustration of the value, under certain conditions, of the evidence of a qualified witness in the work of searching for the missing.

Despite repeated steps by the ICRC, the Italian authorities did not of their own accord communicate to the Agency the names of Free French PW whom they held. Individual enquiries had to be made, to which the answers were long in reaching Geneva.

Landing in North Africa and Italian Campaign

The Anglo-American landing in North Africa, which led to these territories joining the French Movement of National Liberation, involved a great increase of work for the French Section. The staff, which had been reduced to 50 after the work relating to the Battle of France had been finished, had to be increased to 80 assistants.

As a result of the landing, North Africa, which has a large French population, was entirely cut off from the home country. The French African colonies had meanwhile also joined General de Gaulle, and the French Section had to serve as an intermediary in various fields between the home country and the French territories in Africa. The Section undertook many enquiries in liaison with the French Red Cross in France, and in various parts of the French Empire in Africa.

One of the consequences of this complete severance of relations was that the General Staff of the new French Army in Africa sent to the Agency information about members of that Army who had been killed in action¹. On the basis of information thus received, the French Section prepared letters for

¹ For reasons of security, the places of death and burial were not given on these documents.

the next of kin in France. These letters were forwarded to the French Red Cross in Paris, which sent them to the addressees in a tactful manner, through its departmental committees and local branches. This work lasted throughout the Italian campaign, and its volume increased as further French units joined the Allied forces.

Political Deportees

During these military events, numbers of French citizens were deported by the authorities of occupation, and the applications about them became increasingly pressing. A separate Service was set up to deal with these cases. Since the German authorities supplied no particulars about these deportees, the Section approached the German Red Cross with individual enquiries about them. This Society had stated its readiness to receive such applications and transmit them to the German police. The German authorities never supplied Geneva with any names, so that the endeavours of the French Section, whose staff had been temporarily increased to 115, proved fruitless.

However, the ICRC succeeded in sending individual relief parcels to deportees whose addresses were known. The receipts often bore, in addition to the signature of the addressees, those of other detainees, who had seized this opportunity to make known their whereabouts. The French Section was thus able to establish lists, which it afterwards sent to the Ministry for Ex-Servicemen and War Victims in Paris.

Civilian Workers

By virtue of the agreements concluded between the German Government and the French authorities of Vichy, French citizens were enlisted in France and sent to Germany as civilian workers. Although an official agency (*the Commissariat général d'action sociale pour les Français travaillant en Allemagne*) was set up to handle all matters connected with this class of persons, a large number of civilian workers applied to Geneva with questions of all kinds. Their relatives likewise sent many

enquiries to the Agency. Since Germany had no central card-index on civilian workers, the investigations undertaken by the French Section as a result of these applications were difficult, and often unavailing.

The names and addresses of civilian workers might obviously have been taken methodically from the quantities of Civilian Messages which passed through the Agency on their way from the workers to their next of kin. But this considerable task would have seriously delayed the forwarding of the messages. The Section therefore enclosed with the messages a card of standard size, which could be filled up by the addressees and returned to Geneva, thus giving the French Section, without loss of time, the name and addresses of the workers concerned.

III. FROM THE ALLIED LANDING IN FRANCE TO THE RELEASE OF THE PW AND DEPORTEES

Liberation of French territory

The Allied landings in the summer of 1944 and the opening of a front in France led to the stoppage of all direct postal relations between the liberated French areas and the PW camps in Germany. The French Section thus received large numbers of messages addressed to PW. At the same time, the camp spokesmen sent to Geneva letters addressed to the relatives, or lists of families, from whom the prisoners were anxious to hear.

In September 1944, as soon as the Allied forces had reached the Swiss frontier, the Central Agency took steps to have mail for French PW sent through Swiss territory. Application was made in Lyons to the Directorate of PW and the French Post Office, and in Berne to the Swiss Post Office. Following on these negotiations, the direct exchange of mail was established anew, and thousands of mail-bags passed through Switzerland. The French Section was thus relieved of an exacting task, which its reduced staff could not have carried out within a reasonable space of time.

In connection with the operations of the French Forces for the liberation of France (First French Army and French

Forces of the Interior), the German authorities, despite urgent representations by the ICRC, supplied only occasional and fragmentary information about the capture of French combatants. As a matter of fact, these captures were comparatively few, since the French forces generally possessed the initiative in these operations.

Repatriation of Deportees and PW

Whilst the Allied forces liberated French territory, the delegates of the ICRC in Germany succeeded in entering certain concentration camps and organized, with Red Cross trucks, the repatriation of deportees through Swiss territory. On April 9, 1945, the first convoy of French deportees, comprising 300 women, arrived at Kreuzlingen from the camp at Ravensbrück. Their names were taken on the spot by the Agency and sent to their families.

Later, the French Section used the wireless to announce the names of PW and deportees who were repatriated through Switzerland. It arranged for these persons to fill out notification cards during the journey, and the names were read the same day over the wireless.

When deaths occurred during repatriation, the French Section was notified and at once advised the next of kin. In many cases, the relatives were notified in time and were able to be at the bedside of the dying.

The liberation of French deportees and PW by the Allied forces put an end to the work of the French Section, as far as these people were concerned, but brought into relief the cases of all those who were missing. The French Section thus continued to receive many requests for investigation.

A large part of these applications were sent to the French and Allied agencies, who were able to deal with them through their investigation commissions in Germany¹. In many cases,

¹ In particular, the Ministry of Ex-Servicemen and War Victims, the French Red Cross, the International Committee of Catholic Chaplains, and the Associations of Prisoners and Deportees.

however, the records of the French Section supplied the data for a reply, which the Section forwarded itself, thus entailing further secretarial work, well beyond the conclusion of the war.

Alsatians and Lorrainers

Although the French Section had practically completed its task as regards the French in German hands, it continued to register and to handle enquiries and information relative to the Alsatians and Lorrainers who had been forcibly enlisted in the Wehrmacht. Already during the war, it had dealt with cases relating to Alsatians and Lorrainers, and it therefore continued, on the basis of documents received from the Detaining States, to establish lists, which were sent to the Ministry of Ex-Servicemen and War Victims in Paris.

British Section

Before surveying the work of the British Section and its evolution some features of a general nature may be noted.

The British Commonwealth comprised Great Britain, the Dominions and India, all States party to the Geneva Convention, and each having its own official Information Bureau. In addition it covered a number of territories and colonies throughout the world. The many States with which the Agency had to maintain direct contact entailed a certain complexity in the structure of the British Section.

The fact, however, that Great Britain and the Dominions were not occupied by the enemy allowed a great degree of continuity in their relations with the Agency. Moreover, the close and confident association which the official Bureaux and the National Red Cross Societies of the Commonwealth at all times maintained with Geneva, eased the task of the British Section to a very considerable degree.

Further, the remoteness of many of these countries and the slowness, or severing of postal communications often forced the Section to send the information received by telegraph. This procedure, which was an innovation in the Central Agency, formed one of the special features of the Section.

The British Section was set up on September 14, 1939, to handle cases concerning British subjects in all parts of the Commonwealth. For the sake of clearness in the following account of events which influenced the development of the Section, we must distinguish between the European and African zones of operation on the one hand, and that of the Far East on the other.

EUROPEAN AND AFRICAN ZONES OF OPERATION

During the first phase of the existence of the British Section, that is to say, from its formation until the Battle of France in 1940, it remained only a small department. The Expeditionary Force had not been in action during this period, therefore the number of PW — airmen and seamen — was very small. On the eve of the German offensive, this number amounted only to some few hundred. Information received from the German Official Bureau in Berlin¹ was at that time passed on exclusively by photostat and ordinary mail to the official bureau in London, the Prisoners of War Information Bureau, a branch of the War Office.

The real work of the Section began with the operations in Norway and the Battle of France in 1940. With the invasion of France, direct postal communication between Geneva and England was severed: after that time, on the initiative of the Section information was telegraphed to the Bureau in London, the first of these telegrams being despatched on June 18.

During the summer and autumn of 1940, the Battle of France caused a considerable flow of information to the British Section, chiefly in connection with events at Saint Valery-en-Caux, (capture of a Scottish Division) and Dunkirk. The Section was therefore forced to increase its strength, which grew from one or two to more than twenty by the end of 1940.

With the entry of Italy into the war and the ensuing African campaign (with its many fluctuations) a new factor intervened — the engagement of troops from countries of the Dominions, India and the Colonies. To the German Official Bureau was henceforth added another source of information, the "Ufficio Prigionieri di Guerra" at Rome, the official Information Bureau established by the Italian Red Cross.

¹"Wehrmachtauskunftstelle für Kriegerverluste und Kriegsgefangene" (Army Information Office for Casualties and PW) of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (Army High Command) referred to in this report as "OKW".

In anticipation of future operations, the delegation of the ICRC in Cairo arranged with the British military authorities of the Middle East, during the summer of 1940, that it should have direct information regarding Italian prisoners, for transmission by cable to the Agency.

In compensation, the ICRC obtained from the Italian authorities that they should send notification by telegram of captures and deaths of British military personnel in the African theatre of war. At the request of its delegation in Cairo, and in order to enable the latter to notify the military authorities of the Middle East, this information was thenceforward transmitted by telegraph simultaneously to the Delegation and to the Official Bureau in London. The first of these telegrams to Cairo was sent on August 21, 1940.

As a result of negotiations with the official Bureaux of the various Dominions during 1941, it was decided that the Central Agency should cable direct to the Bureaux the information it received concerning the nationals of these countries.

This decision was the beginning of an intensive flow of information between the British Section and the following official Bureaux (the date of the despatch of the first cable is given in brackets) :

Canada :	Department of External Affairs, Ottawa	(July 2, 1941)
Australia :	PW Information Bureau, Melbourne	(Sept. 1, 1941)
New Zealand :	Prime Minister, Missing PW Enquiry Office, Wellington	(Sept. 10, 1941)
South Africa :	South African Red Cross, Johannesburg	(Oct. 9, 1941)
India :	Adjutant General Branches, Delhi	(Nov. 10, 1941)

Subsequently, telegrams addressed to some of these departments were sent, at their request, to their liaison office in London, which ensured their being forwarded. The technical

problems raised in the distribution of this information will be examined below.

During 1941, the campaign in Cyrenaica continued, the initiative passing in turn from one side to the other, and the Italian East African campaign was coming to a close. The outstanding event of the year was, however, the British campaign in Greece, which had its fateful ending on the embarkation beaches of Kalamata and in the mountains of Crete. The Section at that time received a great amount of information.

The delegate of the ICRC in Athens meanwhile took the initiative in obtaining from the Greek Red Cross a list of the British PW in the transit camp at Corinth, where the majority had been assembled before their departure for Germany. This work was later to prove invaluable, for the official German lists only arrived at the Agency after a long delay. In addition, the delegation of the ICRC in Greece itself succeeded in collecting a great deal of information regarding British PW in Greece and sent this to Geneva, thus lightening the work of the Section.

In 1942, the Libyan campaign followed its course of alternate advance and retreat. The most significant event in its bearing on the British Section was the major offensive of the Axis forces against Egypt in June, in the course of which many units were captured. In spite of the important part taken by the Africa Corps in this campaign, these PW were taken in charge by the Italians, and later transferred to Italy. In accordance with the arrangements mentioned above, their names were telegraphed by the "Ufficio Prigionieri" during the summer and autumn of 1942. This flow of information contributed greatly to the development of the British Section into one of considerable importance; at the end of 1942, its strength had already increased to close on 100 persons.

By reason of the military operations in Africa, and in consequence of circumstances described below, the British Section from the end of 1941 until September 1943, when Italy capitulated, was primarily concerned with the problem of its relations with the Italian authorities.

Although the telegraphic notification of capture by the Italian Official Bureau did as a rule operate normally, the

notice of transfers to permanent camps was most unsatisfactory. This was due to the notorious inadequacy of the information given by the Italian military authorities to the Bureau, in spite of the praiseworthy efforts it made. In a great number of cases, it was only after considerable delay or insistent requests that the British Section was informed of the prisoners' permanent camps.

During the whole period, the frequent omissions in notifying deaths and the delay in the receipt of hospital returns were likewise the cause of considerable difficulties to the Section. These difficulties were all the more appreciable, since prisoners in Italian camps were, until April 1943, unable to send capture cards. It is true that from this date the Italian authorities introduced a system of cards called "initial capture cards". These were at once established in triplicate; one copy was sent by post to the man's relatives, the second to the Agency and the third kept by the Ufficio.

This interesting innovation unfortunately came too late to be of any real value.

Although the Allied landing in North Africa in November 1942 had no immediate effect on the British Section, the event was, nevertheless, of importance in the reactions which it was to bring about. From this date onwards, in fact, the Allies were to keep the initiative in Africa.

Henceforth, the Axis forces no longer captured large numbers of British troops. In fact, it has been confirmed that almost three-quarters of those killed, missing or taken prisoner, and whose cases were investigated by the Section, were connected with operations before this date.

The fall of the Fascist regime and the armistice signed by the Italian Government during the summer of 1943 had important repercussions on the British Section.

As a consequence of these events, the German Government sought to seize the British PW in Italian camps with all speed. The relative slowness of the Allied advance during the autumn of 1943, made it possible to carry out this plan and the majority of these PW, many after only a brief spell of liberty, fell into German hands. A certain number, however, were able to reach

the Allied lines, whilst about 6,000 succeeded in crossing into Switzerland, where they were interned.

In these conditions, Italy ceased to exist as a Detaining Power, and from this time the Ufficio dealt only with occasional cases relating to Allied PW.

The first step of the German authorities was to transfer all recaptured PW to Germany. This transfer created special difficulties for the British Section with regard to PW mail.

Information relating to the new camps only came through to the Central Agency by degrees and often after long delay. This fact gave rise to an accumulation of correspondence at the Agency itself, and at the Swiss and British post offices. On account of this general situation, the British Section on September 10, 1943, decided to hold up all mail intended for Italy, and to file the letters whilst awaiting particulars which would enable them to be forwarded.

The postal authorities in London and Switzerland, after consulting Geneva, sent to the Central Agency all correspondence addressed to prisoners in the former Italian camps, and this was also filed to await further particulars.

During the following months, the Section, acting on information received from Germany, re-addressed letters and cards and sent them on their way; more than 800,000 were thus dispatched. The whole staff of the Section were at times pressed into service to complete this task; the Auxiliary Sections and a number of British subjects interned in Switzerland also lent their aid.

Besides this work, the British Section by careful checking helped in the re-addressing of more than 150,000 parcels, held up at the post office in Basle, which were intended for the men who had previously been in PW camps in Italy.

No outstanding event in connection with the European zone of operations was of significance in the work of the British Section at the end of 1943 and during the first months of 1944. The situation brought about by the transfer of prisoners from Italy to Germany righted itself by degrees, with the receipt of information giving the men's addresses in the new camps. The

capture cards sent by the prisoners, and the remarkably well-prepared lists drawn up by camp leaders in most of the camps, contributed to a large extent to this return to the normal routine. These documents formed at this time one of the main sources of information for the Section, and were all the more appreciated because, in the circumstances, the official German information was often subject to long delay.

Reference should be made here to the air operations, which were of primary importance in the conduct of the war by the Commonwealth and the United States, and for that reason, had widespread repercussions on the British Section. In contrast to the course of land operations, British air warfare against Germany gained importance and developed steadily since 1942. Information regarding British airmen, who had fallen, either dead or as PW, into enemy hands was regularly received.

On the basis of reciprocity, which was adhered to by the British authorities, the German official Bureau telegraphed the names of these airmen throughout the war, as it did in the case of PW who died in captivity. These telegrams were at once forwarded by the British Section, and this procedure ensured a priority transmission for the initial notifications regarding airmen. In favourable conditions, the official Bureaux of the Commonwealth were thus able to receive information in less than a week.

The last phase of activity of the British Section in relation to the European zone of operations began with the Allied landing in France of June 1944. Although, as strategy, it was to introduce events so great and so decisive, the landing had little or no direct effect on the work of the Section. The Allied armies, who continued to hold the initiative, were no longer subject to great losses by casualties or prisoners. It was in other fields that the effects on the British Section of this last phase of the war in Europe were apparent, and chiefly in that of postal communications.

In the first place, all postal traffic was suspended on the eve of major offensives as a security measure. In the second, the transport of mail became precarious, or was even quite

often suspended by the destruction done to buildings, railways, bridges, etc. In addition, the advance of the Allied armies from East and West towards the heart of Germany had the consequence of a general and often disorganized withdrawal of Allied PW camps towards the Central and Southern regions of the country. On this account, an increasing number of camps were no longer within reach, and correspondence addressed to them had to be held at Geneva.

The British Section, owing to these circumstances, only received delayed and often contradictory information on the location of the camps, and its work thus became extremely complicated. At this time the correspondence with the camps was the chief concern of the Section, as communication with the German official Bureau became more and more precarious. It should, however, be noted that this Bureau did its utmost until the end to send information relating to captures, deaths and transfers.

During the period of operations immediately preceding the capitulation of the German forces, the British Section, in spite of the suspension of the postal service between Switzerland and Germany, made every attempt to keep in contact with the PW, in an effort to send their mail at all costs and to get from them news for their relatives. It was able to do so only by making use of the "block trains" and fleets of motor-trucks organized by the ICRC itself for conveying food supplies to the camps.

The release and repatriation of the PW, which began with the advance of the Allied armies, continued, and was soon completed after the end of hostilities. Thus, the sudden ending of a situation which had been so alarming for these men only a short while before, coupled with the fact that the British Section, unlike other departments, was not called upon to deal with post-war problems, explains why its activities decreased so rapidly after the cessation of hostilities.

FAR EAST THEATRE OF WAR

The sudden entry of Japan into the war on December 7, 1941, soon confronted the British Section with new problems. During the first months of war in the Far East, the initial and local superiority of the Japanese forces brought about a series of reverses for the Allies. Two of these had considerable repercussions on the Section: the surrender of Hong-Kong on December 26, 1941, and that of Singapore on February 15, 1942. It was during these two operations that the greater part of the men were captured who were to be the concern of the Far East Service, set up by the British Section to deal with all cases relating to the war in the Far East. The situation soon became stabilized, and by the summer of 1942 the Allies regained the initiative, which they were to keep until Japan capitulated on August 10, 1945.

The entry of Japan into the war meant for the British Section dealings with yet a third official Bureau: the "Huryojohokioku" or Prisoners' Information Bureau of the Japanese Ministry for War. The first communication was received on February 17, 1942. It is true that the Section had already received some information from the Japanese Red Cross, as well as from the Swiss Legation and the delegation of the ICRC at Tokyo.

Owing to the difficulty in communicating with Japan during the war, the wireless telegraph was from the outset the only means of communication used by the official Bureau of that country for transmitting information on PW.

The transmission of telegrams received from the Bureau, whilst fairly regular, was slow, and at the end of hostilities a considerable number of prisoners and of deaths in the camps had not yet been notified. Moreover, it was only through the notification of their transfer to other camps that the capture of a great number of PW came to the knowledge of the Section.

A particularly anxious problem was that of PW whose country of origin was India. They were for the most part Sikhs and Gurkhas, who have always formed a large proportion of the troops recruited in India by Great Britain. The Japanese

authorities did not rate these men as enemies because, in their view, they belonged to the "common sphere of interest of Greater East Asia", and therefore in no way considered themselves bound to list and notify them. These men, therefore, had to be treated as missing, and the British Section, much against its will, found it therefore impossible to take action on the long lists of applications coming in from India.

The European and African theatres of war raised a certain number of problems which, although awkward, were well-defined, and rather of a technical nature, whereas the Far East never ceased to constitute a problem in itself for the British Section. This state of affairs may be explained by the peculiar views of Asiatic peoples concerning the human being and captivity in war¹. This point of view leads them to accord little importance to the individual, and hence to often disregard the rights of the prisoner : they are equally little concerned with the personal rights of men of their own race. Moreover, if one considers the disgrace attached in the mind of a Japanese to the idea of surrender to the enemy, the deplorable situation of Allied prisoners in Japanese hands may be understood, as may the lack of information received concerning them, the poor result of enquiries to Japanese bureaux, and the isolation of these men from their relatives.

This serious situation was aggravated by the fact that the ICRC could have no personal contact with its delegates in the Far East, and by the refusal of the Japanese Military Authorities to allow delegates to communicate with the PW representatives in the camps.

It will be understood, therefore, with what relief a proposal of the Japanese Government in 1944 was received : this was for the exchange of messages through the Central Agency, between PW and civilian internees in Japanese hands and their relatives, by means of one telegram a year for each person concerned². Unfortunately, the system did not work satisfactorily except in the direction from next of kin to PW ;

¹ See Vol. I, "Conflict in the Far East",

² For further details see p. 61.

in the other direction, which was of the greater interest, only a couple of thousand messages were received from Japan and forwarded to the relatives concerned.

During the war in the Far East, the large number of civilian internees in Japan, China and other areas under Japanese administration held an important place in the concern and activity of the Far East Service of the British Section. In addition to the cabled lists received from the Japanese Bureaux in regard to them, this Service had to deal with many Civilian Messages, which passed through Geneva and which were the only link of communication between the internees and their relatives, since these were not able to use the PW mail. These messages were handed by the National Section, instead of the Civilian Message Section, because they formed an invaluable source of information.

The Far East Service also acted as intermediary in the numerous enquiries set on foot at the request of relatives, in behalf of civilians domiciled or interned in the Far East. As the majority of these were in China, it fell to the delegates in that country to carry out these investigations, a task usually involving difficult and laborious work.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE BRITISH SECTION

Telegraphic Communications

As already mentioned, the British Section made frequent use of the telegraph in communicating information received from the Detaining Powers to the various official Bureaux of the Commonwealth.

In order to save time in checking at the Bureaux and to keep their expenditure on cables as low as possible, the British Section, as the mass of data increased, was led to work out a particular scheme for the drafting of its telegrams. This method, as will be demonstrated, differed from that of the other National Sections (with the exception of the American Section).

Information received by the Section was divided in two categories as follows :

1. — Information (for instance, telegrams received from German authorities regarding airmen) which appeared to be notifications of capture. These were telegraphed without the corresponding documents being checked in the index, and the making out and filing of cards was only done later.

2. — Information (for instance, the lists received from camp leaders in Germany) which appeared to be supplementary details, and which could not be telegraphed direct without running the risk of making serious mistakes in the information sent to official Bureaux¹, or of costly repetitions. These particulars were first entered on cards, which were checked in the index. The filing clerks then decided, on the basis of their research, whether the communication should be sent, or not.

Two instances might occur — either it was considered that the information was premature or already known, when it was not telegraphed and the card was simply filed, or it appeared to be new and was telegraphed ; in this case the card (or batch) was taken from the index and replaced by a slip showing the reason for its removal.

After being sorted according to the prisoner's country of origin, the cards were collected every day for the drafting of telegrams to the different official Bureaux. Each bore concise references, giving the date and nature of the communications sent and enabling these to be checked at any given time.

One cannot exaggerate the decisive part played by the filing staff in the procedure described. This personnel had in fact the responsibility, which was only part of their duties in the British Section, of effectively carrying out the system of communicating information by telegraph, which had been adopted by understanding with the various countries in the Commonwealth.

The staff had therefore to be thoroughly familiar, not only with the various filing rules for the card-index, but also with

¹ For instance, the danger of reporting, on the basis of out-of-date information, the camp locality of a prisoner who had since died, and whose death had been the subject of a communication.

the particular arrangements made with each separate official Bureau for telegraphic communications.

Such was the method used in the British Section for telegraphing information. Although it complicated the work of the Section and appeared to slow down the sending of information, it was however the only scheme which made possible the transmission of large masses of information, in a rational way.

Mention should here be made of the enquiries opened by the Section, at the request of the British authorities, to obtain statements from witnesses with regard to missing British army personnel and upon which more detailed information is given in the first part of this volume (page 50).

German Section

The German Section was formed on September 14, 1939, the date on which the Polish, French and British Sections were also organized. It began like most of the National Sections of the Central Agency, in a small way ; it was to become the largest of them, both in respect of the number of cases that went through its hands and the size of its staff. As matters turned out, during the last period of its existence the major part of the Agency's activities came to be concentrated in this Section.

There are two main periods in the work of the German Section : the first was during the war, and the second after it had ended.

During the war, the Section operated more or less normally. After the war, however, the disappearance of the German Government and of any body qualified to serve as a central official Bureau had the effect for the Agency of creating entirely new conditions in its work which were unexampled in the annals of the ICRC.

I. WAR PERIOD

This was the period when Germany was at war with many countries. That fact had far-reaching effects on the Section and gave rise to a number of technical problems. The various countries at war with Germany all had different methods for sending information on prisoners and other victims of the war : the German Section, in greater degree than the other national Sections, had thus difficulty in settling on its working methods. There was great variety in the sources of information, and that

meant that there was equal diversity in the nature and form of the documents.

The main obstacle encountered by the German Section from 1941 throughout its history was, however, the complete lack of information regarding the Eastern front. The repeated endeavours made by the ICRC to find a remedy for this serious gap are described in detail in Vol. I of the present Report. This absence of information meant that there were gaps in the index, and this proved a great handicap to the Section and made complete co-ordination of its work very difficult.

The methodical and detailed work of German organizations and the discipline of the people were, on the other hand, helpful to the Section. Formal instructions were given to the German public to put all their enquiries about PW or relatives through the intermediary of the German official Bureau¹ and the German Red Cross². These organizations sorted the enquiries and only sent on to the Central Agency those which raised any problem. The German Section was in this way relieved of much routine work, done in Germany, and was freed to that extent for more complex duties.

Such were the main features of the German Section during the war. The effect of military events on it will now be examined.

Campaigns in Poland and in Norway.

First Campaign in the West

(1939-1940)

The first phase of the war did not involve the German Section in much work. The few German prisoners taken were soon released. The main business of the Section was the transmission of information concerning deaths of members of the forces, and in opening enquiries on missing men. The search for information on men who had disappeared in northern Norway was often difficult to carry out.

¹ "Wehrmachtauskunftstelle für Kriegerverluste und Kriegsgefangene" of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (usually called "OKW").

² Usually called "DRK".

Air and Naval War against Great Britain (1940-1941)

Like most air and naval actions in the recent war, these operations were remarkable for the fact that they engaged a relatively small number of men. The numbers were few, it is true, but the crews were picked men whose fate was closely followed in Germany. Another feature was the very high proportion of missing and, above all, of killed.

These facts are sufficient explanation why the names of dead or captured enemy airmen and sailors were telegraphed by both Germany and Great Britain. Thus the British official Bureau¹ announced death or capture of German airmen and sailors by telegraph to the Central Agency. Immediately these telegrams were received by the German Section, the information was forwarded by telegram to the Berlin official Bureau.

Many of the great number of enquiries undertaken by the German Section were often complicated by the fact that when planes were shot down, it was difficult and sometimes impossible to identify bodies burned or cast up by the sea.

At this time the Section made many collective enquiries on plane or submarine crews, for example, and questioned eyewitnesses. On the whole, these efforts were fruitful.

Yugoslav and Greek Campaign (1941)

The course of this campaign was so swift that no call was made on the work of the German Section until the final phase, when Crete fell to the forces of the Wehrmacht. It will be remembered that it was on this island that there was bitter fighting between German parachutists and the Australian and New Zealand troops. After these battles the Section received some 3,000 enquiries about missing parachute troops.

When the island was evacuated, the British forces took with them to Egypt some hundreds of PW whose names were telegraphed by the Middle East official Bureau.

¹ Prisoners of War Information Bureau (PWIB) of the War Office.

The Campaign in Africa (1940-1943)

The first German action on African soil was in the Ethiopian campaign in 1940-1941, when many German volunteers served in the Italian army. Some of these volunteers were German settlers living in Italian East Africa, and others were seamen and passengers on vessels who had managed to reach the Italian port of Massawa, on the Red Sea. Those among them who were captured in battle were considered by the British as PW and so reported ; the others were arrested and were classed as civilian internees when the campaign came to an end. Among these the former members of ships' crews were interned in separate camps for merchant seamen. These cases gave rise to involved and protracted enquiries. Thanks to information sought from witnesses, for the most part, it was possible to trace a large number of the men¹.

The German forces came into action in the Libya campaign in the spring of 1941, when the Axis Powers first went on to the offensive. It was, however, in the second offensive, in June, 1942, that the "Afrika Korps" was engaged in force. This picked corps was followed with such interest in Germany that it might be said every missing man was the object of an individual enquiry to the Central Agency. Desert war conditions made search extremely difficult : bodies quickly became buried by the sand and generally, once the action was over, troops did not again pass over the ground outside the tracks. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that enquiries carried out by the Section did not, in the main, yield results.

The second battle of El-Alamein (Oct. 23 to Nov. 4, 1942) saw the beginning of the German reverses in the Mediterranean theatre and in the west. On that date too, the strategy of Germany turned, in the main, from the offensive to the defensive. This turn of the tide in the war became still more apparent when the Allies landed in French North Africa on November 8, 1942.

These events were the beginning of a period of great activity

¹ The "snow ball" method, already mentioned in Part I of this Report (see p. 51) yielded very conclusive results, particularly in regard to men killed in battle.

for the Section. Capture cards arrived in thousands as well as notifications of deaths and of captures from the enemy official Bureaux ; this was the inevitable result of military reverses. There was also a big increase in the number of enquiries from Germany as to the fate of the missing. These facts accounted for the rapid growth of the German Section. In May 1943, its staff consisted of nineteen persons ; at the end of the same year, it had risen to fifty-six.

The battle of El-Alamein was followed by the hard-fought retreat of the "Afrika-Korps" through Libya, the defensive battles of Tunisia and, finally, the capitulation at the beginning of May 1943, of some 150,000 men in the Tunis sector and the Cape Bon peninsula.

Up to the time of the campaign in Tunisia, the German Section had to deal, for the most part, with only one group of Detaining Powers, Great Britain and the Dominions. The Commonwealth sent its information to the Central Agency by way of the London and Middle East¹ official Bureaux. Later, however, the Section had to consider two more Powers : the United States and Free France. The first telegram from the American Official Bureau² with names from the Tunisian front was received in April 1943.

Most of the PW captured during the last phases of the fighting in Tunisia were taken by the United States, the remainder by the Free French. Those in American hands were removed from transit camps in North Africa to the United States ; those captured by the French remained in Africa. Men taken previously by the British Eighth Army and announced by the Middle East official Bureau were, generally speaking, sent to Great Britain and to Canada.

From June, 1943, and up till January, 1944, the Section had to cope with a stream of telegrams from the Washington official Bureau, announcing the arrival in camps in America

¹ Prisoners of War Information Bureau, 2nd Echelon (Middle East Headquarters) in Heliopolis (Cairo), entrusted with all communications concerning PW and deceased in the Middle East.

² Prisoner of War Information Bureau, Office of the Provost Marshal General of the United States War Department, Washington.

of PW taken in the latter part of the campaign in Tunisia.

Notifications of prisoners in French hands were sent on individual cards by the French official Bureau in Algiers¹.

The slowness of postal communications between countries overseas and Geneva during the war explains why, up till 1944, the British Commonwealth and the United States usually had recourse to telegrams for communicating their information to the Central Agency. At the close of January 1944, however, in view of the considerable expense entailed, the German official Bureau asked that transmission by telegram be given up, and that in future these communications be made by means of lists, identity cards and microfilms.

It should also be mentioned, in connection with the war in Africa, that as the German Authorities had not recognized Free France, the German Section was obliged to take over certain activities previously carried out by the Protecting Power.

Italian Campaign (1943-1945)

This campaign opened on July 10, 1943, by the Allied landing in Sicily and ended on May 2, 1945, by the capitulation of the German forces in the north of Italy. It will be remembered for some violent battles, but generally speaking it was a slow war of movement interrupted by two periods when the front was stabilized: one was during the 1943-1944 winter before Cassino, and the other during the following winter in the Ligurian Apennines and before Bologna, on the "Gothic Line".

With the early days of the Italian campaign, there arrived a large number of notifications of deaths sent to the German Section. The percentage of unknown was high and entailed attempts to establish identity, which were impeded by the frequent shifting of the Allied military organs to whom application for information had to be made. Later, capture cards and information on PW also flowed into the Section.

After the temporary stabilization of the front in the winter of 1943-1944, there began a war of position, similar to that of

¹ Direction du Service des prisonniers de guerre en Afrique du Nord.

1914-1918. The German Section then received a very large number of requests for enquiries to be made, and it did its best to satisfy them. The Section had no indication as to which Power held a particular PW of whom details were requested; application was therefore made simultaneously to the military bureaux of each of the three Allied armies in Italy, through the intermediary of the Committee's Delegations in Algiers, and later in Naples.

During the first part of this campaign PW taken by the Allies did not remain in Italy, but were transferred to North Africa, Egypt, the British Commonwealth countries or to the United States. Notifications were therefore sent according to circumstances, by the American official Bureau in Algiers, the London official Bureau, or the official Bureau of the Middle East. During 1944, however, regular PW camps were set up by the Allied forces in Italy itself, and the Central Agency thereafter received notifications from the Information Bureau and from the Peninsular Base Section.

In respect of the Italian campaign, information furnished by the American forces was in the form of camp lists or rosters; the British and French forces, for their part, made use of individual forms, called identity cards.

*Liberation of France,
Invasion of Germany and Allied Air Offensive
(1944-1945)*

With the Allied landing in Normandy on June 6, 1944, and later in the South of France on August 15, began the final phase of the war in Europe. An almost overwhelming amount of work then devolved on the German Section. From the end of the summer, capture cards began to arrive from thousands of PW who had fallen into Allied hands within a few months, either during the Battle of Normandy, or during the rapid advance of the Allied armies through France and Belgium. The Section, in view of this ever increasing influx of notifications, had to take on many more assistants: the staff rose from

61 members at the close of June, 1944, to 93 in December and 169 in June, 1945.

The vast significance of events and their rapid sequence obliged the Section to devote its energies henceforth almost exclusively to the most urgent work: communication to the German official Bureau of the great volume of information sent in by Allied military offices on those who had died and on PW, and transmission to enquirers of relevant details from the mass of information yielded by "tallies" in the card-index. It was no longer possible to respond so readily to requests for enquiries as formerly, and a decision had to be made to reply only to those which had an exceptional claim to attention.

During the autumn of 1944, the mass of information received was greater than ever, and the rate at which it came in, far from slackening, gathered speed throughout 1945. The collective notifications relating to the campaign in France were immediately followed by those covering the various phases of the advance into Germany, during which steadily increasing numbers of men were taken prisoner.

This great press of work, even though additional help was given by the Auxiliary Sections in various towns in Switzerland, placed the German Section and the general technical sections of the Central Agency (in particular the Lists and Photostat Sections) in a difficult position. On the one hand, recruitment of fresh staff could not be assured, and on the other, the Agency's premises and equipment had now practically reached their limit. In these circumstances, increasing delay in giving attention to the hundreds of thousands of capture cards and documents coming in from all sides was inevitable.

During the period of the war in Europe between the landing in France and the German capitulation, information reached the Agency by various means. Notifications from American sources were sent in the form of microfilms by the Information Bureau attached to the Command for the European theatre of operations, which was first set up in England and later in France. Details from British sources, consisting of individual identity cards of PW and of lists of deceased, came from the London official Bureau. Information from French sources

came at first direct from various regional military authorities (F.F.I., etc.). It was only after several months that a central official Bureau began to operate in Paris¹ and attended to these communications. The notifications took the form of individual cards, of which the first arrived in Geneva in August, 1945.

The destruction in Germany by the Allied air offensive then seriously complicated the work of the Section. A large part of the population (which it was admitted finally, reached a sixth of the whole) had to move as a result of the raids. Partial destruction and the frequent moving of offices entrusted with collection of information supplied by the Central Agency, and finally, the loss of countless mail bags in bombed trains, all helped to increase the uncertainty felt in Geneva, since there was no means of ascertaining what proportion of the German Section's communications reached their destination.

In the course of the final stages of the war, when the administrative machinery in Germany was completely dislocated, these difficulties were still further aggravated, and the Agency considered it advisable to stop transmitting information, which was henceforth held back in Geneva. The last communication to the German official Bureau left Geneva on April 30, 1945.

During the post-war period, examined further on, the Central Agency was called upon, in several respects, to serve in the place of the eliminated German official Bureau, until it could be reconstituted.

Eastern Front

No official information respecting the Eastern front reached the Agency²; even so, the German Section received numerous enquiries as to the men who had served on that front, especially after the battle of Stalingrad. Various unsuccessful attempts were made to obtain information by means of enquiries in the U.S.S.R. In these circumstances, it was not possible to

¹ This was attached to the *Direction générale des prisonniers de guerre* of the Ministry of War.

² See p. 158 and Vol. I.

transmit to Germany more than a very small amount of information received now and then¹, and a few post-card messages to relatives which reached the Agency via Ankara ; the PW in certain Soviet camps had been allowed, towards the end of 1942, to send news to their families by such cards.

In South Eastern Europe, however, the situation was rather different when Rumania and Bulgaria went over to the Allied camp, and when Yugoslavia and Greece succeeded in liberating themselves. Rumania and Bulgaria at first sent the Agency a few lists of PW, but all endeavours to obtain full information were in vain, as these men were subsequently handed over to the Soviet authorities. In Greece and in Albania, the number of enquiries opened by the Section was small, since only a few Germans had been captured or had died whilst in enemy hands. These enquiries were most difficult, in view of the circumstances in which these men had disappeared. The names of PW detained in Yugoslavia could be obtained only after the armistice. The situation of these men, who had been cut off from their relatives even long before their capture, was a matter of much concern to the Section, and great efforts were made to restore the contacts for them.

Towards the end of the war, Poland and Czechoslovakia also became Detaining Powers of German PW ; the Section thus received, in time, a great deal of information from these countries.

Transfers of Prisoners

Before this survey of the progress of military operations and their effect on the German Section is finished, a few words must be said with regard to another factor which had an important bearing on the work of the Section, namely, the transfers of German PW from one country to another, and especially from one continent to another.

¹ For example, names of PW collected on leaflets dropped by Soviet airmen, or evidence furnished by PW who had escaped, on comrades in captivity.

Transfers of PW within a country, or within a particular territory did not throw much additional work on the Section¹, because the regional or national postal service permitted contact to be kept with PW without undue delay. On the other hand, transfers on a big scale from one country or continent to another caused much difficulty. These transfers interrupted prisoners' mail, often over many months ; the stream of letters reaching the Section clearly reflected the anxiety of relatives and the growing despondency of the men.

It has to be borne in mind — and this is only one example — that certain PW, captured in Libya, placed in camps in Egypt, later shipped across the Indian Ocean and interned temporarily in South Africa, were again embarked and carried across the Atlantic to their final destination, Canada. Every conceivable endeavour was made to obtain information and to forward it to the persons concerned without excessive delay, but at the price of incredible effort. Very often, all trace was lost of certain of these men as, at the last moment, though on the embarkation lists, they were unable to set out on account of their poor state of health. Others were put into hospital *en route* without the Agency being advised ; others again, escaped or died before the arrival of convoys at their destination.

These transfers also had the serious effect of almost completely putting an end to the method of enquiry by evidence systematically pursued by the Section : this was due to the difficulty of reaching the majority of witnesses in time.

Civilian Internees

Before the war, there were large German colonies in many countries. In time, most of these countries came to be in a state of war with Germany, or at any rate broke off diplomatic relations with her ; this led to the internment of a great many

¹ Except during the very last months of the war and the postwar period in France, when some of the PW were dispersed in large numbers of small labour detachments, and moved elsewhere when the work was finished.

German nationals. Official lists of civilian internees began to reach the Agency in large numbers. These lists were transmitted to the competent German offices, and the Section found that it had to extend its enquiries to the whole world. A considerable number of enquiries were opened, in particular in the United States, Great Britain, India, Australia and South Africa, countries which had particularly large contingents of German civilian internees. In respect of Europe, the Section was called upon towards the end of the war to deal with several thousand enquiries on German nationals in Rumania, and was able to transmit some 2,000 telegraphic messages from internees before their transfer to Russia.

It often happened that civilians were interned, then released, only to be interned again ; their exact status could be ascertained only after several protracted enquiries. Further, it was sometimes difficult to draw a distinction between civilian internees and common law prisoners. In all these instances, searches, enquiries as to health, forwarding of mail, transmission of documents, and all other kinds of service encountered serious obstacles.

The object of the enquiries made by the Section varied as much as the circumstances of the internees, some of whom had lived apart from their relatives for many years ; their living conditions, especially in tropical countries, were sometimes far from what was customary. Further, certain areas, difficult enough to reach in time of peace, became almost inaccessible when means of communication were wanting and there were no offices to serve as intermediaries.

Transfers of civilian internees from one continent to another were less frequent than of members of the forces. They nevertheless took place. Thus, men interned in the Dutch Indies were taken to British India during the Japanese advance, but the women and children, left where they were, were later taken to Japan and to Manchuria by the Japanese army. It devolved on the Section to establish contact between members of families separated in this way, and it was found possible to send their mail from Japan by way of the Trans-Siberian railway, Tiflis and Ankara to Geneva, whence it was forwarded to India via Cairo

A feature of the problem was that certain civilian internees hesitated to make themselves known. As adversaries of the Hitler régime, they feared for their relatives. Similarly, some of them framed their requests for news of relatives who had remained in Germany with the utmost caution. We need only think in this connection, of the situation of German nationals who had served in the French Foreign Legion. This all entailed, obviously, particular problems for the Section.

Cases concerning German or stateless Jews were first assembled in a self-contained section for Sundry Civilian Internees (CID = *Civils internés divers*) ; but later, when it became increasingly difficult to distinguish these particular civilians from others in the absence of adequate indications, they were included in the German Section's card-index.

Civilian internees and their relatives required from the German Section not only much labour of varied kinds, but also involved it in great moral responsibility.

* * *

The following is a summary of technical details of the work of the Section during the period of the war.

Information

Until 1943 the British Commonwealth, then the only group of Detaining Powers which concerned the Section, supplied information that was in every respect precise and complete, and in a great variety of forms. This information related to persons who were comparatively few in number, and as it arrived punctually at regular intervals, the Agency was able to send the information to the responsible German organizations and to give satisfaction to applicants within a reasonable time.

After the capitulation of the Axis army in Tunisia and the large transfers of PW which followed, the situation was wholly different ; transmission of information then became impeded by many obstacles. For instance, details of men interned in the United States were sent in cables of unusual length and the

percentage of mutilated names was very high¹. Further, capture cards, brought over by the Committee's ships in the absence of other means of transport, reached Geneva only after considerable delay. Very often, in these circumstances, it was no longer possible within a reasonable time to reassure relatives who, owing to the irregular working of the mail service for PW, were anxiously awaiting news.

These facts led the German Section to encourage by all possible means the use by PW and their relatives of the Express Message² for their communications. These messages came through Geneva at the rate of several thousand per month.

The pressure of work was however, only relieved by the use of microfilms. By such means, lists of over 2,000 names and home addresses of PW in an extremely small space could be sent by air. In the great majority of cases they gave enough details to make identification possible. The rectangular negatives of which the film was made up, each contained the names of some fifteen men and could be enlarged at the rate of sixty an hour, i. e. 900 names. They were a very serviceable substitute for cables which, up to that time, had been used as a means of transmission.

There was a fresh problem when part of France was liberated by the F.F.I. These forces were obviously hardly equipped to organize an official information service, and the German Section received a vast amount of miscellaneous data transmitted by local branches of the French Red Cross, by priests and pastors and by members of the public. It frequently even received anonymous notes. This information was used only with the greatest caution, particularly in the matter of notifications of deaths.

Difficulties of another kind arose from the fact that lists of PW contained a high percentage of non-Germans, or of men

¹ Mutilated names came to between 6 and 20 per cent. These cables contained from seven to eight thousand words each on an average; the one of record length, received on December 27, 1943, and the longest cable which ever reached the ICRC, consisted of 335 pages (21,590 words) and gave notification of 2,341 prisoners.

² See p. 62.

of doubtful nationality enlisted in the Werhmacht. The Section found itself faced with a number of very awkward problems, too extensive to give in detail here. At all events, the German Section always handled "mixed" documents (relative to men of different nationalities) with great care and discretion.

Applications

Throughout the war applications came from three different sources.

(1). The German authorities, that is, the High Command of the Armed Forces (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, or O.K.W.) and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (*Auswärtiges Amt*).

The O.K.W. submitted requests almost exclusively for information on missing members of the forces. To meet certain legal requirements, it asked that individual enquiries should be made in respect of each case. The O.K.W. further often proposed an enquiry by evidence and indicated which men should be questioned. The Foreign Office sent the Agency, by the intermediary of German diplomatic representatives, requests for enquiries mainly concerning persons of rank or position.

(2). *The German Red Cross.* This organization sent requests for enquiries concerning civilians or civilian internees, on the state of health of certain PW, the location and upkeep of graves, and other details, and finally, urgent communications to be telegraphed to PW, and complaints bearing on the working of PW mail. It also sent in requests for enquiries on members of the forces missing on the Eastern front.

(3). *Private persons.* According to the rules, relatives resident in Germany were supposed to apply to the O.K.W. or to the German Red Cross, on whom it devolved to sift these enquiries and to transmit only those to the ICRC which were judged to need the Committee's especial help. As the number of losses increased, however, and anxiety took hold of an increasing number of the public, it became more difficult to insist on this restriction. The Section then received a growing number of

applications from relatives, through members of the same family and friends passing through or living in Switzerland, from international organizations or from National Red Cross Societies. Many letters even came direct from Germany, though they had been opened by the censor.

* * *

To get a clear picture of the means of action available to the German Section during the war period, it must be remembered that PW and civilian internees were for the most part detained in countries at a great distance from Geneva, while the relatives, and public and private organizations receiving information from the ICRC were, generally speaking, in Germany or in a neutral country, that is to say, near Geneva. This meant that, up to the time of the collapse of the Reich, postal communications being practically normal, it was possible to send information available at Geneva fairly quickly to the persons concerned in Germany. Direct despatch of documents (photostats) and letters was thus the rule, and information by telegraph the exception. On the contrary, messages for transmission to PW and internees were often a long time in transit, as great distances, uncertain means of transport and censorship all contributed to hinder and delay communications. Therefore, it was often necessary to fall back on telegrams or express messages.

Up to 1944 and as long as most enquiries were made by official organizations (O.K.W. and German Red Cross), the German Section was able to organize and maintain a full service of individual enquiries. The O.K.W. forwarded requests only after careful scrutiny and when the date a man was reported missing made it reasonable to presume that his name was unlikely to appear in official lists received from Geneva by the High Command. Notwithstanding the fairly large number of these enquiries, the card-index yielded only a relatively small number of "tallies". Enquiries opened by the Section were generally well received by the offices and persons to whom they were addressed. These were, according to cases, the official Bureaux or the National Red Cross Societies of the enemy

States ; frequently too, application was made to the delegates of the ICRC and to the PW themselves, who were asked to furnish evidence.

Unfortunately, from the summer of 1944 the developments of the war steadily reduced the Section's field of action. With the increase in number of prisoners and of deaths, most enquiries took the form of private letters, and there was a growing tendency for urgent appeals to arrive much in advance of the receipt of the required information by the Section. Further, the main official Bureaux of the enemy States declared, one after the other, that they were unable, for lack of time, to attend to requests for individual enquiries, or that they could deal with them only at the cost of disturbing the regular transmission of routine information. In these circumstances the Section had to cut down the number of its enquiries. Obviously, the increase in requests for enquiries resulted in an appreciable increase in the responses yielded by the index and that, in turn, put an additional strain on the correspondence services.

During the second period of the Section's work its scope was to be even further limited.

II. POST-WAR PERIOD

With the armistice of May 7, 1945, Germany entered into a far more troubled period than that experienced during the last phase of the war. The surrender of the German army, the capture of several million men by the Allied forces, the collapse of the Military High Command and the Government, together with the loss of political sovereignty and territorial integrity created in Germany an unprecedented situation, whereby the Central Agency was faced with extreme difficulties.

The fact that there were no longer in Germany any national agencies with whom to co-operate rendered the Agency's task most uncertain. The first phase of the post-war period was indeed a critical time of transition for the German Section ; the complete suspension of postal communication, added to the

destruction of roads and railways, still further complicated its task.

It was only after several months that this situation improved in some degree, and that a slow adjustment to the extraordinary circumstances brought about by the defeat and quadripartite occupation of German territory, began to take shape. The ICRC did its utmost to encourage this progress. First, it endeavoured to make up for the fact that national German bodies had ceased to exist by setting up in that country a network of delegations, more especially fitted for their new tasks by the drafting in of experts from the Agency. Later, the Committee encouraged the setting up of a German organization which, under the control of the occupying Powers, was able to assume the duties of the O.K.W. and the German Red Cross, and to replace the former official Bureau.

The rate of the development thus begun increased considerably after the resumption of postal services with Germany on April 1, 1946. This date was so important in the growth of the German Section during the post-war period that it may be well to use it for the purpose of dividing the rest of this survey in two parts.

(1). *End of Hostilities (May 7, 1945)*
to Resumption of Postal Service with Germany (April 1, 1946)

In view of the conditions of chaos existing in Germany, the Central Agency had decided to suspend entirely the despatch of information to the official Bureau and to the German Red Cross : this was on April 30, 1945, a few days before the end of hostilities. As it was later learnt in Geneva, most of the regular despatches of the German Section had for some time past failed to reach their destination and had been lost in transit.

Masses of information sent in by some ten Detaining Powers therefore accumulated in Geneva, where they were dealt with according to the established rules, pending the day when they could be passed on to some authority in Germany qualified to receive them. By June 1945, photostat copies of documents thus held up already filled 21 large cases.

The initial phase of the post-war period was therefore, for the German Section, mainly one of preparation. During these months, the Agency applied itself, as far as it was able, to the pressing and indeed imperative task of re-establishing contact between German PW and their relatives.

The communication to relatives of information which came together in the card-index with their many applications, was only possible on a small scale during the first months after the end of hostilities, when the Section was reduced to making use of occasional means of forwarding. Thus a large mass of these communications, ready for despatch, accumulated in the German Section.

Influx of Applications from Relatives : Card No. 275

German families who, for many months past, had received hardly any letters or news from the fighting zone, now saw the official sources of information dry up, which had formerly been replenished by a methodical administration throughout the war. The mail of German PW was also, as a result of circumstances, practically held up during the first months which followed the end of the war. At this period PW formed a mass still on the move ; these men were placed in provisional camps, often transferred from place to place and inadequately provided with capture cards and writing paper.

Relatives, who were consumed by uncertainty and anxiety, turned of their own accord to the ICRC, knowing that it was mainly from the Committee that the O.K.W. and the German Red Cross had received their information. Since postal communication was broken off, those families who had such facilities, made increasing use of the medium of correspondents in Switzerland, to bring their applications before the Central Agency. Moreover, they turned more frequently to the various delegations which the Committee hastened to set up throughout Germany, as well as to the national and provincial welfare organizations, who passed on the applications received to the delegations. Thanks to the Committee's resources of road transport, all these enquiries were brought to Geneva.

Thus, despite the suspension of the postal service, the Agency very soon saw an increase in the flow of applications for searches. Since these applications arrived in a variety of forms and sizes, it was necessary to transcribe them to index cards in order to file them in the Section's index. This was a long task ; to carry it out efficiently, a standard research card was required which could be placed in the index when filled in. For this purpose, Card No. 275, which had been devised in 1940, when the French Section was in similar difficulties, was again used. One side of this card was reserved for a description of the man sought, whilst the other bore the Agency's address. Part of the printed matter informed the applicant that no acknowledgement would be sent, and this precaution saved the Section valuable time.

The Agency itself had Cards No. 275 printed and issued them in Germany during the summer of 1945 through the delegations of the ICRC. Many of the German organizations also had these cards printed. Owing to the suspension of postal traffic, it also fell to the delegations to return these cards to the Agency when filled in. Up to June 30, 1947, the number of cards received was 355,400¹.

By the intermediary of the delegations, information which Cards No. 275 elicited in the Section's files was, whenever possible, communicated to enquirers².

Large quantities of Cards No. 275 soon accumulated in the card-index boxes, owing to the considerable time taken in the transcribing to cards and filing of the vast amount of information reaching Geneva. This accumulation was also due to the fact that no amount of publicity by the ICRC could dissuade German next of kin from sending the Agency applications relating to the countless men reported missing on the Eastern Front.

¹ The number of cards printed in Geneva and distributed in Germany amounted to 82,400.

² Communications from the Agency for relatives were received by the Delegations in the form of collective despatches carried by the Committee's vehicles. The Delegations passed them on for further despatch to the German Post Office, which had resumed its service within Germany to a great extent.

*Re-establishment of Contact between German PW and their Relatives : The Red Cross Message (Card P. 10,079)*¹

Whereas German next of kin, owing to lack of news, were in a state of almost complete uncertainty as to the fate of members of the forces, German PW, too, were often in entire ignorance of where their relatives were living, and indeed often did not know if they were still alive.

Inside Germany, a considerable proportion of the population had been forced to leave their former homes (the only address known to PW), as a result of events at the end of the war and at the beginning of the post-war period. To these refugees and evacuees of every kind on the home front were soon added those expelled from the territories east of the Oder-Neisse line, the Sudeten Germans and the "Volksdeutsche" from the regions of the Danube and the Balkans. On the whole, an ever-increasing mass of German civilians on the move, displaced or dispersed, who had left hearth and home behind them without any clue and were thus not to be found. This multitude was moreover appreciably greater than the few million PW.

An equation with two unknown quantities therefore had to be solved : on both sides were people who lacked the addresses of those with whom they sought to regain contact. The problem could only be solved by the intervention of some centralizing agency. The vast number of individuals thus separated left no doubt of the magnitude of the undertaking. It fell to the ICRC to make this attempt from the autumn of 1945, by the introduction of the "Red Cross Message".

A valuable fund of information was available to the Central Agency, enabling it to act to some purpose in this sphere : this was the considerable quantity of data, growing from day to day, on German PW contained in the index of the German Section. These data represented an equal number of PW camp addresses ready to be sent off to any relatives making application. On the other hand, the Agency was almost completely

¹ The "Red Cross Message" should not be confused with the "Civilian Message" or "Form 61", also initiated by the ICRC and mentioned on p. 63.

without information concerning displaced German civilians. It was therefore indispensable, if contact was to be re-established between PW and civilians, to get displaced German next of kin, without news of a relative who was a PW or presumed to be so, to apply to the Central Agency. The surest means of achieving this was to promote the influx of applications for searches concerning these PW, accompanied by a twenty-five word message of family and personal news, and including the address of the applicant.

It was with this purpose in mind that the Red Cross Message or Card P. 10,079 was devised and introduced. In order to speed up transmission and to relieve the German Section of a long copying process, it was necessary that the description of the relatives, the message and the PW's address should appear on a single form which could be easily censored.

The Red Cross Message was therefore introduced with the object of giving German next of kin the three following opportunities :

- (a) to inform PW by way of the Central Agency of their new address ;
- (b) to obtain the address of these PW when it was unknown to them ;
- (c) to send a message to PW.

One side of the card was reserved for the exact address of the applicant and the 25-word message, the other for particulars in detail of the PW for whom the message was intended.

Card No. P. 10,079 which provided the Agency and ultimately the PW with the new address of his relatives, served in some degree the same purpose for the PW as the capture card for his next of kin. This message was often preceded in the card-index of the Section by an anxious enquiry from a PW who, for a long time past, had lost all trace of his relatives. These requests from PW, encouraged by the Detaining Powers, reached the Agency in ever-increasing numbers.

At the end of September 1945, the French authorities gave permission for the issue through post-offices of P. 10,079 cards

in the whole of the French zone of occupation in Germany. During October, the ICRC was also authorized to introduce these cards in the American zone, where they were issued by local branches of the German Red Cross. Finally, at the beginning of 1946, the use of the Red Cross Message was agreed to in the British zone, and the German Red Cross in Hamburg was given the duty of their distribution to relatives. Thus, the system was soon in operation in all three Western zones. The fact that this scheme expanded to such a remarkable extent was sufficient proof of its urgent necessity.

P. 10,079 Cards, after being filled in by next of kin, were censored by the responsible authorities in each zone, forwarded to Geneva by way of the delegations by and means of the Committee's vehicles, and then passed on to the German Section, where they were checked in the card-index and dealt with as follows.

If the address was given in full and correctly, the message was at once forwarded to the addressee. When the address was not given, or when it was incomplete or inaccurate, the German Section, if the necessary information was available, completed the card before despatch, and at the same time forwarded the PW's address to his next of kin on a form. Finally, when the address was unknown both to the sender and to the German Section, the card was placed in the index to await the arrival of information enabling the message to be despatched and the relatives to be informed.

The ICRC had nearly one million and a half P. 10,079 Cards printed in Switzerland and distributed in Germany, by means of its delegations. A number of German welfare organizations had similar cards printed locally; thus the use of the "Red Cross Message" was widely spread.

The first cards filled in by next of kin were returned to Geneva in November 1945. Up to June 30, 1947, the Agency had received 1,644,036, of which it was able to forward 806,793 to the addressees.

The proportion of cards which could be forwarded decreased as time went on. This may easily be understood if it be remembered that the number of relatives who had been able to make

contact with PW constantly grew, and that the P. 10,079 Cards which reached the Agency concerned an increasing number of military personnel, whom their relatives had hitherto sought in vain.

The system provided that next of kin could make use only once of the Red Cross Message. In practice, however, it often occurred that two or three members of the same family each sent in a message, in the attempt to get in touch with the same PW ; this complicated the Agency's work and was likely to delay the contact desired.

The Red Cross Message scheme enabled the Central Agency to find a satisfactory solution to a problem as urgent as it was difficult ; the German Section thus gradually mastered a situation which at first sight appeared overwhelming.

Thus, thanks to Card No. 275, to the Red Cross Message, and to the means of transport available to the Committee, a twofold stream of applications and information was established by degrees, at a time when exchange of messages or information by post was still impossible.

Influx of Information in bulk

During the first months of the post-war period, information concerning hundreds of thousands of German PW captured by the Allied forces in the final phase of operations and after the end of hostilities reached the Central Agency only very slowly. At that time, PW formed a mass of men still on the move and only provisionally encamped, and the Allied military authorities, who were themselves constantly shifting from place to place, had their whole attention taken up by tasks (e. g. PW food supplies, etc.) which were more urgent than the counting of PW and the drawing up of nominal rolls. Moreover, as seen below, the Allies were at this time examining the question of a distinct status for members of units who gave themselves up in obedience to the terms of surrender, and did not supply lists of these men.

It is true that this delay in the despatch of information by the

official Bureaux¹ of the three Allied Western Powers, had in fact little impact on the Agency's general Services or on the German Section, as they were completely absorbed in the work of checking and handling the data received earlier. Reference has been made above² to the difficult situation in which these Services found themselves, from the end of 1944, owing to the increasing influx of information. This situation grew steadily worse during the summer and autumn of 1945; it was, indeed, at about that time that the flood of official lists and identity cards from Allied sources reached its height, at which it remained throughout 1946. To this was added the constantly increasing number of applications (Cards 275 and P. 10,079) reaching the German Section, the handling of which occupied a large proportion of the staff.

Owing to the immense amount of information which reached the Agency (often more than a year after the date of capture or of death) the time which elapsed before the information had been copied on to cards and filed in the index gave rise to some anxiety. Vast quantities of applications awaiting action accumulated in the card-index, and the main duty of the German Section at that time, the re-establishing of contact between PW and their relatives, was in danger of being frustrated.

If a serious setback was to be avoided, the output of work in the German Section had to be increased at all costs. Whereas the long period during the war when German losses were relatively low, had given the Section time to develop methods responding to the needs and wishes of the official bodies with which it co-operated, the turn of events now made it a matter of urgency and necessity to adopt working methods which would ensure a far greater output.

The difficulties encountered were considerable. In the first place, the inevitable dispersal of part of the staff at the end of the war and the lack of trained personnel to replace them; in the second, the gradual diminishing of the financial resources

¹ American official Bureau in France, British Bureau in London, and the French Bureau in Paris, to which were added later the Allied official Bureaux in Italy (British at Rimini, and American at Leghorn).

² See p. 164.

of the ICRC, which prevented an increase of staff. Although the German Section could not avoid a certain amount of fluctuation in its work and considerable delays, the satisfaction remained nevertheless, of having overcome most of the obstacles it had encountered. In no other National Section and at no other period of the Agency's work between 1939 and 1947 did changes on such a scale occur. This is illustrated by the following figures :

	1944	1945	1946
Total number of cards filed in the German Section during the year	612,000	2,870,000	4,605,000
Total mail (number of items) received by the Section dur- ing the year ¹	873,000	2,753,000	2,900,000
Average number of staff in the German Section.	66	145	190

From 1944, the German Section made use, to an increasing extent, of the very efficient help of the Auxiliary Sections working for the Agency in other towns in Switzerland. This form of aid was, however, still not enough. Since there was a lack of staff available in Geneva, the Agency consulted with the military authorities, and from the autumn of 1945 set up working teams amongst the German internees in Switzerland and later, amongst German PW in a French camp near Geneva. These teams, often consisting of highly qualified men, gave invaluable aid to the Section at critical moments².

Transmission of German PW Mail

During the summer of 1945 the Swiss Post Office informed the ICRC that more than 1,200 bags of mail for German PW in France, Great Britain, Italy and the United States, were held up in their offices at Basle owing to the suspension of

¹ These figures do not include items received by the Lists Section and meant for the German Section.

² See p. 92.

postal traffic with Germany. The ICRC was therefore asked to forward this mail to Germany by its own transport, if possible. The Committee was able to give effect to this request, and the Agency organized in September the sorting of the mail by postal districts. Since it was impossible to undertake this amount of work in the Agency itself, it was entrusted, by agreement with the competent authorities, to selected members of the German forces interned in Switzerland. As soon as it was sorted, the mail was sent to Germany by Red Cross vehicles and there handed over to the German Post Office or to the censor. In seven months, that is from October 1945 to April 1946, over six million letters and cards were thus sorted under the Committee's auspices and forwarded by its own transport. The resumption of postal traffic in April 1946 fortunately relieved Geneva of this additional burden.

Special Problems: Surrendered Enemy Personnel, and German Civilians evacuated from Eastern Europe

Any account of the period which followed the end of the war would be incomplete without reference to two categories of war victims which, the one military, and the other civilian, placed the German Section before serious difficulties.

Immediately after the capitulation of the German Army, many more thousands of men gave themselves to the Allies, the majority in obedience to the terms of surrender. These units were disarmed and confined in certain areas. Since the status of PW had not been granted by all the Powers to these men — "SEP" or Surrendered Enemy Personnel, as they were to be called later — the German Section received only scraps of information concerning them and had no means of making enquiries about them. The Agency, owing to the flood of applications from relatives who believed these men to be "missing", was in a difficult position. It had to content itself with the occasional lists and news sent in by the German commandants and camp leaders of the huge regional encampments in which SEP were assembled. The efforts of the Committee to secure for them a status equal to that of PW were only partly success-

ful, and did little to reduce the Agency's difficulties. Indeed, it was only by the return of these men to their homes, after being gradually released or converted into civilian workers, that the SEP problem took its course towards a practical solution.

German civilians evacuated from the countries of Eastern Europe set problems of various kinds for the German Section. Its means of action were very limited, faced as it was by the mass transfers of German-speaking civilians expelled from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Rumania and Yugoslavia, who came streaming into Germany where disorder reigned, and by the flood of enquiries, often by wire, which accompanied this exodus.

Searches, which in general had small chance of success, implied enquiring at the last known residence outside Germany, in order to try and follow the trace of refugees to places of assembly, refuge or internment somewhere in Germany.

In Czechoslovakia, the delegation of the ICRC was able to supply information direct, in a few cases. Later, the communal administration offices (*Narodny Vibor*) undertook the task of tracing the German civilians in that country. In Poland, it was not until 1947 that the Polish Red Cross was able to co-operate in the search for German civilians. Finally, in the absence of more efficient means, and despite the uncertainty of this method, the German Section frequently had recourse to the broadcasting of nominal lists during the especially critical post-war period, and it must be said that this method gave useful results.

(2) *After Resumption of the Postal Services with Germany*
(April 1, 1946)
Increase in Flow of Enquiries

The official resumption of a postal service between Germany, Switzerland and most other countries, brought the German Section a certain relief, since it allowed the direct and regular forwarding of the great number of communications awaiting despatch to relatives. On the other hand, this resumption gave rise to a vast fresh influx of applications. Since the majority

of the 275 and P. 10, 079 Cards had until then still not been answered, it was natural that next of kin should avail themselves widely of the opportunity of writing direct to the Agency. A flood of letters, usually both long and urgent, and often followed up, poured into the German Section, whilst standard cards continued to arrive in steady volume. The great pressure of work laid on the Section at that time is clear from comparison of the following figures :

Number of Applications (Letters and Forms) received by the German Section:

Average 1942-1944	44,000
In 1945	207,000
In 1946	737,000

If it be remembered that hundreds of thousands of items of information from Allied sources reached Geneva during the same period, and that pressing reasons forbade any increase in staff, the difficulties confronting the Section may be realized. Although, from the autumn of 1946, an average of 1,000 "tallies" a day had been reached, these were often quite obsolete, or even contrary to actual facts. Thus, in certain extreme cases, data concerning the capture of a service-man did not get into the index until after his release, which brought fresh enquiries from the relatives.

Information also frequently became out of date owing to the fact that some detaining Powers, e. g. the United States, began to hand over part of their prisoners to other Powers, such as France and the British Commonwealth. These transfers caused frequent misunderstandings, since the U.S. authorities described these men, who had in reality only been sent back to Europe, as having been "repatriated", whereas the PW themselves, the Agency and next of kin gave this term its true meaning.

Amongst the applications concerning service-men, a particularly large number related to those reported missing on the Eastern front. As already stated, the German Section had neither information nor means of taking action in this area, and

therefore endeavoured to dissuade the public, chiefly by printed forms, from applying to Geneva and referred it to the German Tracing Bureaux, described here.

The mass of enquiries received by the German Section did not all relate to members of the forces ; applications were made to the Agency in increasing numbers to trace civilians. This activity, which did not come within the Conventions, added a good deal to the burden of work. Since the end of the war, and in Germany itself, a whole network of *Suchdienste*, or Tracing Services, had been set up which were expert in this type of tracing, and had extensive card-indexes at their centres in Munich and Hamburg. The public was, therefore, not bound to apply to the Agency in this matter, as it was in the case of tracing members of the forces. The ICRC made immediate contact with the *Suchdienste* ; it offered them advice, and gave them stimulus and support in the co-ordination of their activities. It was the hope of the Committee that these offices would gradually take over from it the heavy burden of its work in tracing civilians. At the same time, intensive publicity was given by press and wireless to the fact that the German public would be well advised to apply to the Agency only in cases concerning members of the forces.

*Problem of unsolicited transmission of information
by the Agency*

The Central Agency was conscious of the heavy responsibility resting on it owing to the existence in Geneva of a very large amount of information still unknown to next of kin, and was increasingly concerned with the serious problem of how to get it to Germany as speedily as possible. As already stated, information which had accumulated in Geneva since April 30, 1945, owing to the dissolution of the German official Bureau, had since that date been communicated to next of kin only when both application and information cards came together in the Section's card-index. A very considerable amount of data could therefore not be forwarded. The situation was especially serious concerning information bearing on the deaths

of members of the forces ; as a result of this inability to communicate with them, many German families, who had suffered a loss months before, were still in a state of tragic unawareness.

It was, therefore, a matter of necessity that local and regional German bodies should be able to ensure at least the distribution to the relatives concerned of the most urgent information, that relating to deaths, until a Central Office had been set up which would replace the former official Bureau¹.

The Agency applied itself to this urgent problem from that moment. With a view to hastening its solution, an expert of the Agency went to Germany in the summer of 1945 to inspect some of the many regional organizations which had been set up since the war ended. A certain time was to elapse, however, before a central body could be found which offered the necessary guarantees and to which (after it had been duly recognized and commissioned by the Allied Occupation authorities) the Agency could send its valuable data.

In April 1946, after the resumption of the postal services between Switzerland and Germany, it was decided to wait no longer, and to send unsolicited notifications of deaths which had accumulated in the German Section since the end of the war, and all those arriving later. These notifications were made to the burgomasters of the places of residence of next of kin, whenever the address was known, and these officials were requested to have death certificates drawn up by the registrar and conveyed to the relatives. This method seemed to provide sufficient security, in view of the official functions of the burgomasters and of the existing possibility of reaching them henceforth direct by post. Moreover, a number of the burgomasters, working in co-operation, had set up small communal offices. With regard to notifications of death in cases where the address of next of kin was unknown, it was decided to forward these to the Tracing Bureau of the Bavarian Red Cross in Munich ; this agency, thanks to the extensive card-index it possessed, seemed to

¹ The German Red Cross, which might in principle have been considered as a central body for giving information to next of kin, in fact no longer existed in its centralised form and was able to re-establish itself only slowly and in some of the occupation zones.

offer the best chances of finding the relatives concerned. During the following months, a considerable part of the work of the German Section consisted in sending out these notifications.

From this time onwards a number of legal documents and papers from PW were also forwarded to next of kin through the competent District Courts.

Meanwhile, it was discovered that the former card-index of the German army and a large part of the staff of what had been the *Wehrmachtauskunftstelle* or WAST (German official Bureau), had resumed their work in the summer of 1945 under American supervision at Fürstenhagen, near Kassel; they were transferred, in the spring of 1946, to the American sector in Berlin, and thence to Frohnau in the French sector, in the summer of the same year. There, under the name of "Office for liquidation of the former German Bureau WAST" ¹, under French supervision and commissioned by the Inter-Allied Control Council, this office continued and completed, by the intermediary of registrars' offices, notifications to the next of kin, of deaths of German service-men which took place before the end of the war. The Agency was able to verify on the spot that this organization was working in a satisfactory manner. The German Section therefore decided in December 1946 to cease working through the burgomasters, and to rely exclusively on the new WAST organization for forwarding all information in future on the deaths of members of the forces.

As regards notifications of deaths, this decision restored in fact the normal activity and procedure of the Agency which had been interrupted since the close of hostilities. The German Section handed over to WAST at this time all papers in its possession relating to the deaths of unidentified members of the forces. In most cases, the only indication found was the regimental number on the identity disc, and WAST was alone in a position to establish the identity of the deceased, thanks to the card-index of the German Army in its care.

¹ *Abwicklungsstelle der Deutschen Dienststelle für die Benachrichtigung der nächsten Angehörigen von Gefallenen der ehemaligen Deutschen Wehrmacht.*

The Agency also handed over to WAST, during the summer of 1947, some 75,000 "collections" of personal effects of German members of the forces which had been sent to Geneva since 1945 by the official Bureaux of several States¹. A separate department was set up in WAST to take charge of handing over all these effects to next of kin, besides those which it received direct from different parts of the world.

The very important problem of the systematic transmission to Germany of all data which the German Section possessed concerning the deaths of members of the forces, was thus satisfactorily solved.

The Section continued, on the other hand, to communicate information on German PW only on request. It was argued that, by the end of 1946, all next of kin, or nearly all, had been able to re-establish contact with PW by post, and that any regular forwarding of information was no longer required.

Beginning of Winding-up

Owing to the repatriation and release of an increasing number of PW, the situation of this category of war victims tended to right itself by degrees, and the duties of the German Section were at the same time lightened. These duties were also reduced to a certain degree by the fact that cases relating to Austrians had been dealt with by an independent National Section since the autumn of 1945, that those concerning men from Alsace-Lorraine were dealt with by the French Section, and those concerning men of the South Tyrol by the Italian Section.

During the first months of 1947, the transcription to index cards of the great volume of information received from the Allied official Bureaux up to the end of the previous year was completed. Thenceforth, the German Section, whose staff was now being reduced², was able to devote the greater part of its time to correspondence and enquiries arising from the great

¹ See p. 79.

² On June 30, 1947 there were still 98 assistants in the German Section.

number of letters which were still coming in and which increasingly referred to complicated cases.

It was thus not until over two years after the end of the war that the largest of the National Sections of the Central Agency began to be wound up, after a busy career of eight years, of which this report has given only an incomplete survey.

**Spanish Section Portuguese Section
Latin American Section**

As soon as the Central Agency opened in September 1939, a Spanish Section was formed, which continued in fact the activities of the "Spanish Service" set up at Geneva in 1936 at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War¹. At the close of the Civil War, in April 1939, a large quantity of mail continued to reach the ICRC from Spain and France. This correspondence had reference not only to situations still arising out of this war, but also to cases of Spanish refugees in France, Latin America, the USSR and other countries.

Later, as the need arose, a Portuguese Section and a Latin American Section were set up. For the sake of convenience, these three Sections were grouped under the same direction.²

We shall consider separately the work of each of these Sections.

SPANISH SECTION

In April 1939, at the end of the Civil War, about 500,000 Spanish Republicans took refuge in France; it was chiefly with these men that the Spanish Section was concerned throughout the World War.

From May 1939, a certain number of these refugees enlisted in the French Foreign Legion, and the Section undertook many

¹ The activities of the ICRC during the Spanish Civil War is the subject of a separate report.

² The staff of these Sections never exceeded five persons.

enquiries about their fate. A still greater number were conscripted by the French authorities and detailed to groups of foreign workers, but their status was never clearly defined. In May and June 1940, a certain number were captured by the German army, interned with French combatants in PW camps and reported to the Central Agency as "Spaniards".

In 1942, the Agency learned through enquiries from relatives that Spanish nationals were amongst those in the concentration camp of Mauthausen in Austria; it ascertained that amongst them were a great many of the above-mentioned PW. It was only at the end of the war that it became known that 7,211 Spaniards had been deported to Mauthausen.

As in the case of deportees of all nationalities, the ICRC made repeated efforts to learn the names of these Spaniards and to find out what had become of them, but no lists were ever sent to the Agency. Only a few messages were forwarded, and some notifications of death were received in reply to the enquiries made by the Section.

On May 5, 1945, the Spanish survivors of Mauthausen were released by American forces and soon afterwards brought back to France. One of them, who had been employed in the camp office, had succeeded in preserving the lists of names recorded throughout the time the Spaniards were held in captivity, and was able to hand them over personally to the Agency. It was thus known that 4,813 deportees had died in captivity in the camp. Their names were at once communicated to their next of kin in France and Spain.

The numerous Spanish refugees living in France frequently applied to the Central Agency for help in getting in touch with their relatives in Spain. The Spanish Section thus became responsible for the transmission of messages and various documents. There were, besides, enquiries concerning Spanish children who had been harboured in various countries in the course of the civil war, and whose parents had lost trace of them. Lastly, the Section had to deal with cases of Spaniards engaged in the forces of the belligerents.

PORTUGUESE SECTION

As Portugal was not involved in the war, the Portuguese Section had only a limited task.

It had to deal with a few cases of Portuguese seamen, chiefly natives of Goa and Damao (Portuguese India), serving on British merchant vessels and captured by the Germans. It also received lists of Portuguese members of the "Hongkong Volunteer Defence Corps" captured by the Japanese, and lists of Portuguese civilians living in refugee camps in the Far East.

Finally, it had to handle various cases of Portuguese civilians living in countries with which postal communications were difficult.

LATIN AMERICAN SECTION

After the severance of diplomatic relations between the States of Latin America and Germany, Italy and Japan, and the entry into the war of some of these States, the Central Agency had to extend its activities to nationals of these countries.

It was chiefly with civilians interned in the Axis countries and in Japan that the Latin American Section was concerned. Lists were received and forwarded to the governments of the countries of which they were citizens. In certain cases the delegates of the ICRC informed Geneva of the whereabouts of internees who were nationals of Latin American States.

The Section was also concerned with seamen from the Argentine, Brazil and Chile, serving in the British merchant service, captured at sea and interned in Germany, and with South American airmen taken prisoner while serving in the Allied air forces.

We should also mention the members of the Brazilian Expeditionary Corps who were captured, or who fell in action fighting with the Allied forces on the Italian front. Their names were

communicated to the Agency by the German Official Bureau and forwarded to the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Finally, all these civilian internees and PW frequently requested the Agency to forward correspondence and news to their families.

Scandinavian Section

This Section was set up in April 1940, at the beginning of the military operations which finally led to the occupation of Denmark and Norway by the Germans. Its object was to deal with cases of Danish and Norwegian nationals. Although Sweden was not at war, the Agency likewise had to handle questions which concerned Swedish citizens, and for reasons of language, they were also included in the Scandinavian Section. After the landing of American forces in Iceland (July, 1941), the Section also undertook the few cases relating to Icelandic nationals.

Because of the particular nature of the war in Denmark and Norway, the Germans left the service men of these two countries at liberty. As Sweden and Iceland did not take part in the actual fighting, the number of cases affecting their nationals with which the Agency had to deal was necessarily small. It is not surprising, therefore, that the activity of the Scandinavian Section in behalf of Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Icelandic nationals was not extensive.

The main task was to search for merchant seamen from these countries, who were serving with the Allies and about whom their relatives in the homeland had no news. The Section also undertook to search for civilians residing in countries with which the Scandinavian countries no longer had postal communications.

The Section served as intermediary for passing on news to the relatives of Norwegian and Danish volunteers fighting with the Allies, when these men were taken prisoner by the Germans. It undertook a similar task in the case of the small

numbers of civilian internees detained by both groups of belligerents.

Lastly, the Section instituted a great many inquiries regarding Norwegians and Danes detained for political reasons and imprisoned or deported by the Germans. These inquiries, like all others of this nature, unfortunately proved unavailing.

Belgian Section Luxemburg Section

BELGIAN SECTION

The Belgian Section was set up on May 15, 1940, during the "Eighteen Days Campaign" (May 10-28, 1940), when the German Wehrmacht advanced from the banks of the Meuse to the coast of the North Sea.

Military Personnel

During the days after the capitulation, part of the Belgian Army was sent into captivity in Germany, where the PW taken during the operations were already in camp.

Notifications by lists from the official German Bureau and capture cards were first received by the Agency early in June : the flood of information reached its height in September. Many applications from the men's relatives were received at the same time in the Belgian Section. In these conditions, and in order to avoid too long a delay in replying to them, it was decided to forward the information given in the capture cards direct to the families concerned, without waiting for cards to "tally" in the index. These notifications were sent at the rate of about 1,500 a week. At this time, the Section reached its peak, with a staff of 27.

A considerable number of prisoners reported to the Agency that they were without news of their relatives ; hundreds of thousands of Belgians, fleeing in disorder before the invasion, had found permanent refuge across the Channel, or temporary shelter in the North, and above all in the South of France. The search for these families called for a good deal of perseverance, as the difficulties involved were considerable.

The general confusion was further increased by the presence in many departments of the South of France of Belgian units which had escaped before the final occupation of their country, but who were believed to have been taken prisoner with the main forces. When these units reported themselves at the demarcation line of the occupied Zone of France, in September 1940, they were for the most part deported to Germany and interned in camps. The total strength of Belgian PW was at that time 166,400, of whom 5,600 were officers. The repatriation of the Flemish PW in the spring of 1941 reduced this number to 80,000, after which it did not appreciably diminish. During the last months of the war, 76,000 Belgian PW were still in German hands, of whom 4,500 were officers.

The Detaining Power sent a copy of the official lists of information direct to the Belgian Red Cross in Brussels. The Belgian Section had thus only to forward to this organization the results of its searches concerning missing members of the forces (a total of more than 2,000 at the end of 1941). These enquiries were addressed to the National Red Cross Societies, chiefly to the British, French, German and that of the Belgian Congo, as well as to the French préfectures and the Belgian Offices in France, Morocco, Portugal and Spain. Finally, the Section devised a system of regimental enquiries by making extracts from the official lists of officers and NCOs of Belgian Army units and from these records questionnaires were sent to these concerned for information about the missing. On the basis of these extracts, questionnaires relating to the missing men were sent to those concerned in the camps.

An important task of the Belgian Section at this time was the checking of the many lists of Belgian PW in Germany to whom relief organizations on the Congo wished to send parcels. The object of this check was to establish the precise address of the consignees, as the lists gave only names, and the addressees frequently changed camps.

From 1943 onwards, the work of the Section relating to members of the armed forces consisted mainly in obtaining for their relatives news of airmen and seamen who had joined up in Great Britain, as well as the Belgian legionaries fighting

in the Free French Forces, and to ensure the exchange of correspondence, official documents, and various papers, between PW in Germany and their relatives. Between the liberation of Belgium and the end of the war, the Agency alone in fact was in a position to take charge of this correspondence, as communications between Germany and Belgium were entirely suspended.

In spring 1945, the Section was fortunately in possession of up-to-date lists, which the Belgian camp leaders had drawn up at its request. The delegation of the ICRC in Berlin, for its part, forwarded to Geneva any information it had been able to collect regarding transfers of PW and the liberation of the various camps by the Allied armies.

Since the end of the war, the Section has attempted to obtain information regarding Belgian soldiers who were missing after compulsory recruitment in the German armed forces.

Civilian Internees

The number of Belgian civilian internees was relatively small : some hundreds at Miranda de Ebro (Spain), lists of whom were not supplied to the Agency ; about a hundred in the Far East, under Japanese control, whose names were communicated through the Belgian Section to the Belgian Authorities ; 230 missionaries interned at Wei-Shien ; and finally, a few scattered throughout Great Britain, Italy and North Africa. The Section carried out the transmission of more than a million messages between the internees and their relatives.

Civilians

Until 1942, an important place in its work was given to non-interned civilians. During that period, the Section was busy searching for those missing after the exodus of the population in May 1940. To save time, it was necessary to open enquiries, and sometimes follow them up simultaneously in France, Great Britain, Spain, Africa and even America. The Section worked in close co-operation with the Belgian Red

Cross and its delegations in the Congo and elsewhere abroad. Very satisfactory results were obtained in this way. During the whole period of the war, the Section was responsible for the forwarding of documents of every kind, such as wills, certificates issued by the "Estat civil", bi-monthly lists of deaths in the Congo, death certificates of Belgians killed in Great Britain during the air raids, and others.

Civilian Workers in Germany

The number of Belgian civilians employed in Germany amounted to about 300,000. The Section was responsible for the forwarding of messages between them and their relatives until the beginning of 1945, but after this date the military operations allowed only occasional communications of this kind.

Political Detainees

It is estimated that about 12,000 political detainees were held in custody by the German authorities in September 1944, of whom 4,000 were on Belgian territory. Eighty-four per cent of the applications forwarded to the German Red Cross by the Agency remained unanswered. Out of 1,247 enquiries opened on behalf of political detainees in Germany, only 25 had a positive result.

Internees in Concentration Camps

From 1943 onwards, the Belgian Section received a considerable number of applications from relatives concerning deportees. Apart from these, the Belgian Repatriations Commission sent the Agency a total of 10,000 cards of application. All "tallies" established on the basis of receipts for parcels¹ — the only means of information at the disposal of the Agency — was passed on.

* * *

¹ See p. 54.

The work of the Belgian Section may be summed up in the fact that on June 30, 1947 its card index held more than 1,000,000 enquiry and information cards. The lists of PW in Germany drawn up by the OKW and camp leaders amounted to 67,000 pages. There were 50,000 individual files (service-men and civilians). The number of enquiries opened may be estimated at 150,000 or more ; the number of documents and messages forwarded by the Section at 300,000 ; the number of communications of data sent to prisoners' relatives at 100,000.

The average number of the staff was ten. In periods of increased activity, from twenty to twenty-five assistants, of whom a third were voluntary, gave their services to the Section.

LUXEMBURG SECTION

The work of the Luxemburg Section was closely related to that of the Belgian Section and both were under the same management.

Members of the Armed Forces

Soon after the occupation of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg on May 10, 1940, a large number of Luxemburg nationals were deported to Germany. Some were enlisted in the German Labour Organization, others were sent to the Eastern territories or to concentration camps. A third category, mostly young men, were compulsorily enrolled in the Wehrmacht. This last category saw active service in all theatres of war, and the Luxemburg Section learned through the men's relatives that several hundreds of them were posted missing.

Enquiries set on foot by the Section were addressed to the German Red Cross, which replaced the Luxemburg Red Cross throughout the occupation. At the beginning of 1946, all applications concerning Luxemburg nationals enrolled in the Wehrmacht and to which the Section was not in a position to reply, were handed over to the Luxemburg Commissioner for Repatriation, who now had the task of instituting enquiries in all countries.

A certain number of Luxemburg nationals fought with the Allies. Those who were captured in 1940 wearing French uniform were classed by the German authorities as French prisoners of war, and their cases were dealt with at the Agency by the French Section. Others who were not taken prisoner during the Battle of France, enlisted in the Foreign Legion and took part in the military operations in North Africa. Those who were captured were interned in Italy and almost all were later removed to Germany. The Section dealt with the exchange of news between the men in the Foreign Legion or who had been taken prisoner, and their relatives. Notifications of death were sent to the German Red Cross, with the request that the families of the deceased be informed.

Civilians

As from May 15, 1940, the Luxemburg Section received many applications from persons who were anxious about their relatives living in the Grand Duchy. Similarly, people in Luxemburg were concerned about the fate of relatives who had taken refuge in France and Great Britain, or who had been sent to Germany as civilian workers. These cases usually had to go through the German Red Cross. Requests were sent to it for the necessary searches to be made, for the communication of reports on the results of such enquiries, and for the transmission of documents of all kinds.

The activities of the Luxemburg Section increased considerably at the moment of the counter-offensive launched by the German army under Field-Marshal von Rundstedt in December 1944. A large number of inhabitants of the Grand Duchy were then removed to Germany and their families were left in a state of great anxiety, as postal services were cut between the two countries. The Section managed to trace a certain number of the persons concerned. On June 30, 1947, the records of the Luxemburg Section contained about 5,000 index cards and 1,000 individual files.

Dutch Section

On May 10, 1940, the German forces crossed the frontiers of the Netherlands and the Dutch forces, compelled to lay down their arms after five days' fighting, were demobilized and disbanded, whilst the majority of the prisoners were released.

The Dutch Section, set up on May 13, 1940, first had to arrange for an interchange of news between the Netherlands and the Dutch who had taken refuge in Great Britain, or those living abroad, especially in the Dutch East Indies. It also had soon to trace civilians ; the Dutch population was subjected to heavy bombing from the air, mass evacuation for military reasons, requisitioning of civilian workers, continual arrests of hostages, and the Jews were deported.

In February and March 1942, the Indian Archipelago also suffered war and invasion ; in the course of these, many members of the Dutch military and naval forces fell into the hands of the Japanese. The Section henceforward had to deal with PW and civilian internees in the camps of the Far East.

For the sake of clarity, the activities of the Dutch Section have been divided into those concerning events in Europe, and those relating to operations in the Indian Archipelago.

(A). EVENTS IN EUROPE

After the capitulation of the Dutch Army in 1940, the greater part of the prisoners were released, with the exception of a few hundred officers of the regular army. In 1943, however, thousands of officers and NCOs were mustered in assembly camps

by the occupying authorities and sent to Germany where, in April 1944, the number of Dutch PW was approximately 10,000. The lists drawn up by the German High Command were sent at regular intervals to the Central Agency, which forwarded photostat copies to London¹.

At the same time, the Section worked in close contact with the British Red Cross in searching for Dutch seamen and airmen who had joined the Royal Navy or the R.A.F. Lists of the dead and missing were received from London, comprising about 2,500 names, which were communicated to the Dutch Red Cross at The Hague.

The Section's work for civilians was especially heavy. Immediately after the events of 1940, telegrams by hundreds and letters by thousands reached the Section from the Dutch East Indies, South Africa, and America, enquiring about the fate of people living in the Netherlands. In the autumn of 1940, two delegates from the Dutch Red Cross in Batavia (Contact Bureau), brought to Geneva eight large metal containers which held 60,000 applications on index cards. By January 1941, the Section had transmitted 100,000 enquiries to Holland, and had forwarded 63,000 positive replies to the applicants.

The Dutch population, as already mentioned, was especially hard hit by the effects of the war. During the hostilities, a total of 570,800 civilian workers were removed to Germany, to the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, or to Poland. From the end of 1944, when communications between Germany and part of Holland had been severed, the Dutch Section had to serve as intermediary between the civilian workers and their relatives, by the exchange of messages.

Moreover, numbers of Dutch civilians were deported to Germany². In spite of all the representations which it made in regard to this question, the ICRC was not able to extend its normal assistance to this category of people. The Section was

¹ From Oct. 6, 1941, until Sept. 1944, to the War Office. From August 27, 1943, until the close of hostilities to the Netherlands Minister of Foreign Affairs through the Delegation of the ICRC.

² According to information received after the liberation, the number was 214,000, including 110,000 Jews.

nevertheless able to register the names and addresses of a great number of the Dutch deportees, thanks to the receipts for the parcels sent by the Committee to the concentration camps, which sometimes came back bearing several signatures.

Enquiries received after the liberation concerning Dutch deportees to Germany were, from December 1945 onwards, forwarded to the Netherlands Red Cross at The Hague, which had set up a Research Bureau able to deal with enquiries of this kind.

Of the 10,000 Dutch enrolled by the Wehrmacht, about 3,000 were reported missing on the Eastern front. Since the Central Agency received no information from the Soviet Union, the Section could not follow up enquiries about these men.

(B). EVENTS IN THE INDIAN ARCHIPELAGO

In February 1942, the Japanese forces landed in the Dutch East Indies. The population had to endure the hardships of occupation ; thousands of settlers were arrested and put to forced labour in Burma or in Siam ; other thousands, including women and children, were interned in the camps of Java and Sumatra. The work of the Dutch Section therefore increased, as regards both civilians and military personnel, who were cut off from any contact with the home country.

From March 20, 1942, until after the end of hostilities, the total figures given by the Japanese official Bureau in Tokyo, usually by cable, amounted to 98,000, including 16,800 notifications of deaths¹. The information received was brief, first names were often missing or were indicated by initials only ; the army number, profession and nature of illness were given in phonetic Japanese in Latin characters, for which a glossary of professions and medical terms had to be made. The applicants, for their part, seldom gave precise details. The substitution of initials for the real first name, or of diminutives,

¹ At the time of the capitulation, the data received by the Section had amounted to 68,650, including 3,540 notifications of deaths.

a common practice in Holland, complicated work on the card-index considerably. The Dutch Section made a list of first names and their usual diminutives, such as Truis for Gertrude ; Bep for Elizabeth ; Riets for Frederick ; Kat, Katje, Catho, Trin, Tridentje, or Toosje for Catherine ; Cor, Cees, Koor, Kees, Nel or Nelis for Cornelis, and so on.

By patient and scrupulous work, more than 12,000 cards were made to "tally" up to 1945, and the information was forwarded to the applicants.

Photostats of cables received from the Japanese official Bureau were forwarded at regular intervals to the Dutch Red Cross at The Hague and in London, also to the representative of the Dutch East Indies Red Cross at Melbourne. When filing the information, it was found that many civilian internees had already appeared on PW lists.

A certain number of civilian internees were able to send news direct to their relatives in Holland, and thousands of reply letter-cards, collected by the Red Cross at The Hague, were received up to April 1944 for transmission to the Dutch East Indies. The information supplied by this exchange of mail often led to "tallies", and information could thus be sent to applicants, especially in Switzerland, Great Britain, America and South Africa. Finally, it was sometimes possible by this means to complete the addresses of relatives in Holland.

Communications between the Netherlands and her overseas territory having broken down, the Section received a considerable number of requests for news concerning Dutch nationals presumed interned or prisoners of war in the territories occupied by the Japanese. Thousands of enquiry forms were sent to the Japanese Bureau for military personnel, or to the Japanese Red Cross for civilians, but the results of these enquiries were most disappointing.

On October 5, 1945, the first message from Batavia, dated September 12, was received at the Agency. A fortnight later, the delegation of the ICRC in Cairo informed Geneva that they could send the Committee's mail to the Dutch East Indies.

* * *

The Dutch Section, with an average staff of over 45 in 1943 and 1944, thus had to deal with numerous tasks of every variety. They had much correspondence with the offices of the Dutch Red Cross at The Hague, in Curaçao and Surinam, with the American, Australian and South African Red Cross Societies, as well as with the Netherlands Emergency Red Cross Committee, a committee of the Dutch Red Cross set up in London in May 1940. Up to June 30, 1947, the Section had received 211,000 letters and 12,000 telegrams; it had opened 86,250 enquiries and forwarded 190,000 messages. By this date, its index-cards numbered 350,000.

In March 1943, the records of the Netherlands Red Cross were completely destroyed during heavy bombing. The Central Agency then had photostats made of all lists received in Geneva, and the Dutch Section made duplicates of all correspondence exchanged. These documents were sent to The Hague, thus enabling the Netherlands Red Cross Information Bureau to continue its work.

French Colonial Section

The French Colonial Section was opened in June 1940, to include all the cases of combatants—PW, dead and missing—natives of the French Colonial Empire¹. If the rule followed by the Agency in establishing national sections had been strictly applied, this Section would have been properly embodied in the French Section. But for reasons which will be given further on, and which were due both to the intricate nature of the questions involved, and the large number of cases to be handled, it was found necessary to open a Section independent of the French Section proper, to deal with cases relating to natives.

The work undertaken in Geneva for Colonial and North African native combatants during the war, in certain respects exceeded that of the other national Sections, for two main reasons : one, because the work was done for people unfamiliar with European customs and for the most part illiterate ; the other, because the very characteristics of these races demanded distinct working methods.

The foregoing explains why the Colonial Section occupied a place apart in the Agency. Whereas the main national Sections were started so to speak automatically when the countries concerned entered the war, the establishment of the Colonial Section was due rather to an initiative of the ICRC.

The report on the Colonial Section will therefore deal at length with its particular task, the peculiarities of its structure and its working methods, which are not described in the first part of this volume.

¹ In this report, the French Colonial Section will be called " Colonial Section ".

Besides the receipt and transmission of news supplied by the Detaining Power, the work of the Colonial Section touched on the following points :

- (1) Maintenance of the link between the PW and his next of kin ;
- (2) Search for the missing ;
- (3) Identification of the dead and notification to the home country of deaths (with a duplicate to the French *Etat civil*) ;
- (4) Cooperation with Government agencies in France and in the colonies.

Of these four points, the two first were among the usual tasks of the Agency, whereas the last two specifically belonged to the Colonial Section.

OPENING AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECTION

At the outset of the war, the cases concerning native PW and missing were handled in the same way as those of French PW and missing ; but this method soon had to be abandoned. The lack of any *Etat civil* in certain countries¹, the illiterate condition of most of the natives—certain tribes have even no written language—their countless namesakes, and the fact that the information supplied by the Detaining Power constantly comprised distorted names, led to many errors and infinite difficulties in the filing.

To meet these serious drawbacks, and to prevent the cards referring to native soldiers being lost forever in the French card-index, a distinct Section was required, with experts having a knowledge of the languages, geography and administrative organization of the various parts of the French Colonial Empire.

The language difficulties encountered were so great that at

¹ For instance, in Morocco.

one time the ICRC considered the offer of the French authorities in Morocco to organize such a section themselves. But this course would have given an advantage to combatants of Arabic tongue over those of Negro Africa or of the other French colonies (Indo-China, Madagascar, the West Indies). It also had one serious defect : during the tragic month of June 1940, it seemed as if one day France would be separated from her colonies and unable to communicate with them. The Agency could not remain indifferent to the fate of these men, the more so as they numbered at the time over 70,000, and appeared more helpless than others, because so many were illiterate. Thus it was decided that the Section would be organized at Geneva itself, and the decision was amply justified by events.

By June 1940, when the Section was opened, all the cards belonging to native soldiers were withdrawn from the French card-index and grouped into the new Colonial Index.

At the same time, a call went out for assistants who had lived in the countries concerned, both repatriated Swiss and former legionaries in the French colonial army ; of these about fifty responded.

This large initial staff is explained by the fact that out of a total of roughly 80,000 cases of PW, dead and missing notified to the Section during the War, 60,000 were due to the fighting in France in 1940, and 20,000 only to all the other campaigns together (military operations in Syria and Madagascar ; campaigns of the Free French Forces in North Africa, Italy and Corsica). The French campaign of 1944 had hardly any effect on the Colonial Section, as the German authorities gave no information about these men.

INFORMATION AND CARD-INDEXES

The initial work of the assistants was to check every name in the lists of PW and dead, and the particulars concerning the missing, to correct errors in names, and to check and piece together, with the help of maps and directories, the addresses of next of kin and the places of origin.

(A). *Basic Card Index*

Once this work was completed, the basic Colonial Index was established as follows in the autumn of 1940 :

(1) Division by geographical regions, i.e., each of the principal colonies, groups of colonies, or French protectorates had a separate card-index. Thus there were : for North Africa, an index referring to Morocco, another to Algeria and a third to Tunisia ; for French West Africa, a single index including Senegal, French Nigeria, French Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Togo and the Cameroons ; there was an index for Indo-China (Annam, Tonkin and Cochinchina), another for Madagascar, one for the French West Indies, etc.

(2) Each regional index was subdivided according to military units. Thus, the index Algeria had subdivision : " 1st Reg. Algerian Tirailleurs " ; the index " French West Africa " had a subdivision " 14th Reg. Senegalese Tirailleurs ", and so forth.

(3) Within each regiment, classification was done by alphabetical order, according to parentage. For instance, when filing Arab names, " MOHAMED son of Miloud " was placed before " MOHAMED son of Tayeb ".

The index dealt only with the fighting in 1939-1940 ; it was later found necessary, on technical grounds, to open independent card-indexes for each campaign : Syria, Free French Forces (Tchad-Libya), Madagascar, etc.

(B). *Numerical Card-Indexes*

The Section was soon obliged, to make a strict check of identity possible, to supplement the basic card-index by numerical indexes, established according to PW numbers and army numbers. This cross-index scheme, in which several indexes played their part, was indispensable :

(a) In the case of the numerical index according to PW numbers, because the German authorities had solved the native language problem by making numerical, and not nominal indexes ;

(b) In the case of the numerical index according to army numbers, because the Italians gave no numbers to the native PW taken in Libya, but merely registered their army number on the capture cards which they forwarded to Geneva.

These same PW, after the capitulation of Italy, were sent to Germany, thence to France, then back from France to Germany, provided this time with PW numbers. The latter however were changed at each transfer, which called each time for a fresh and painstaking search in the two numerical indexes. This clearly shows the need for a double index.

Amongst the linguistic problems which confronted the Colonial Index, the most intricate was undoubtedly the classification of Arabic names. In North Africa the ancien Semitic custom still prevails; the Arabs have, as a rule, only first names : " MOHAMED, son of Hassen, son of Miloud " and so on. These first names give rise to countless variations and derivatives. Thus the first name " AMAR " has more than fifty of these, not to mention the varieties of its derivatives¹. In some cases the same man was notified to the Agency, either by himself, the captor State or the next of kin, under ten or twelve different names, without any possibility, at first sight, of knowing that it was one and the same person. An Arab mother felt very surprised that the Agency had not yet found her son, for whom she had made seven enquiries, each time under a different name !

To cope with the difficulties of filing and consequent errors, an exact " Table of Variations and Derivatives " of the chief Arabic names had to be established, allowing the merging of cards bearing the derivatives of a name under the chief name, corresponding to the " basic form ".

¹ AMARA, AMARI, AMMAR, AMER, AMAIRI, AMERI, AMEUR, AMIR, AMIRI, AMIEUR, AMOR, AMORA, AMOUR, AMOURI, AMRI, AOMAR, AMAROU, AMROU, HAMAR, AOUMAR, AOUIMAR, AOUIMEUR, HAMER, HAMERA, HAMERI, HAIMEUR, AHMAR, HAMOR, HAMOURA, HAMMOURI, HAMRA, HAMRI, HAMROU, HOMAR, HOMARI, LAAMAR, LAAMARA, LAAMARI, LAMOUR, LAMOURA, LAMOUIR, OUMER, OMAR, OMARI, OMEUR, OMEURI, OUMARI, AMRAOUI, HAMRAOUI, AMARAQUI, in addition, the many varieties of the derivatives MAAMAR, AMRANE and BOUAMAR.

Example : Under the chief name AMAR were merged the cards bearing the names AMARA, AMARI, HAMOURI, etc.

A similar table, but drawn up by rule of thumb, was also established to help in the filing of the names of negroes from West Africa and from French Equatorial Africa.

With the assistance of these working tools, the French Colonial Index reached such a degree of precision, that most of the data in it could be used ; it became, and still remains, a centralizing instrument, indispensable for the French civil and military government departments. To reach this degree of efficiency, no fewer than 800,000 cards had to be made out for a total of 60,000 PW and 20,000 missing notified to Geneva.

The subdivision by campaigns of the indexes built up after the fighting in 1939-1940 proved most useful. The index of "Free French Forces", of which there could naturally be no duplicate in France during the occupation, was in particular of great interest. The Free French authorities in London often made use of its documentation, and the Colonial Section was able to supply them with many particulars, especially on the missing after the capture of Bir-Hacheim by the Axis forces in June 1942. About a thousand French colonial military personnel of all races were captured at the time in Libya and taken to Italy. When the latter capitulated, about 150 of these men found refuge in Switzerland, where they were interned.

As in the case of the other national Sections, the Colonial Section regularly sent to the administration concerned—in this instance the *Secrétariat d'Etat à la Guerre* in France—the official rolls communicated by the detaining authorities. In addition, it carefully noted throughout the whole of the war all particulars in these rolls, and was thus able to establish the card-indexes mentioned above. Under these conditions, it was thus possible to follow up the PW at each transfer, send them relief supplies, and within the shortest time possible, notify the various French departments. The Section even went the length of checking the mail of these men, to note where it came from, when in 1944 official German particulars practically ceased to reach Geneva.

ESTABLISHMENT OF EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The Colonial Section being thus organized internally, it sought also to establish external contacts. Its first concern was to get into touch with the French Ministerial departments, the civil and military administration in North Africa, the Governments General in the Colonies and their representatives, the French Red Cross, the various relief committees and the occupation Authorities. As from 1941, it attempted to find correspondents in all countries to which its work extended.

The French administration being disorganized by the invasion, offices had to be opened in North Africa and the Colonies, in order to centralize all the information supplied by Geneva and to communicate it to the next of kin, which the Agency often had difficulty in reaching itself. These offices, working on the spot, were able to supply the required data to the Agency, and to help in searching for the missing and in identifying the dead.

As a rule these attempts were successful, and close and continuous contact was established with North and West Africa. Relations with Indo-China, Madagascar and the French West Indies were more difficult to set up owing to the breakdown of postal services, and were maintained only at the cost of constant effort.

Parallel to the card-indexes, two subdivisions were established to complete the organization of the Colonial Section : the *Secretariat* and the *Deaths Service*.

SECRETARIAT

Its task was to establish and to maintain by all means the link between the PW and his next of kin.

Illiteracy precluding all direct correspondence, there was no question of writing to a native as to an European. The authorities under whom he was, or the relief societies who helped him, had to serve as intermediaries. For the PW himself, this essential intermediary was the spokesman or the camp com-

mander ; for the next of kin, it was the Red Cross or the administration of the country or area concerned.

Moreover, the PW often gave as an address only the name of the chief of the geographical subdivision (*caïdat*, *cheikhat*, district) from which he came. Search had therefore to be made for the area in which these subdivisions were located ; the messages for that area were grouped, and then sent to the civil or military administration, who undertook to deliver them. The duty of these officials was not easy, especially if the relatives were members of nomadic tribes. The answers were sent to the Colonial Section, who undertook to communicate them to the PW. The native, as a general rule, resents any European interference in his life, but he quickly grew to understand that it was nevertheless in his interest to write, or have someone write for him.

An average of 4,000 to 5,000 letters per month thus passed through Geneva from 1941, and increased steadily up to twice that figure in the following years. The natives became accustomed to the care of the ICRC, and brought the Committee all their problems to deal with. All these problems, from the gravest to the seemingly most trivial, were in fact studied and solved with the same care. Thus the morale of the PW was kept up during captivity and their interests safeguarded.. Without always understanding what the Red Cross was, they called it " My dear Mother, Miss Geneva, Mr. Committee " and showed their gratitude in very touching fashion.

As from 1942, almost all the PW mail from native troops or addressed to them, passed through Geneva. To the mail for PW of 1939 and 1940, there was soon added mail from the men who had belonged to the Free French Forces, or who had, on the contrary, fought against the Allies. The former were PW in Italy, the latter in East Africa, the Middle East or the United States of America. The Committee's delegations abroad were then able to render the greatest service to the Colonial Section. They were used as postal relays, when war operations and the break-down of ordinary connections made it necessary. Contact was thus maintained by every means possible.

At a time when it was impossible to send on original letters,

extracts were listed. These lists were handed to delegates leaving on missions, or were sent in several copies and by different routes to the local authorities, who were responsible for communicating them to the next of kin.

Lastly, in 1942 and 1943, broadcasts were organized through the French Radio to give news of Indochinese PW to their relatives. The Colonial Section made up fifteen-word messages from the letters of these men to their families. These broadcasts were afterwards suspended by the occupation authorities in France, but were resumed in Geneva by the ICRC in 1945, thus giving rapid information to next of kin in Indochina of the liberation of the Indochinese repatriated through Switzerland.

In addition to transmission of PW mail, the Secretariat made more than 20,000 individual inquiries during the war (search for PW or service-men whose relatives were without news of them, matters of release, allowances, divorce, etc.). Each inquiry involved many steps, and called for the greatest care.

The matter of these inquiries, though not always belonging to the province of the ICRC, had nevertheless to be handled for various reasons ; the most imperative of these was the disruption of communications between France and her Empire in 1942. The dispersion of French government services called for a coordinating body, and the Colonial Section was that body. The Ministry of War, in particular, constantly turned to it for help, since the records of the native regiments had been taken back to the colonies of origin in 1940.

A subdivision of the Secretariat, the "German Enquiries" service, had the exclusive task of handling correspondence with the OKW, the German Red Cross and the camp commanders. The extreme mobility of the labour detachments (to which most of the native prisoners were assigned and which were brought back from Germany to France in 1940, at the suggestion of the ICRC, on account of the more temperate climate), and the constant transfers of these men, which were not always notified to Geneva, necessitated a great many enquiries. Despite these movements, the location of the PW was followed up, as far as possible, and steps were taken that the Geneva Convention should be applied and the situation of the PW improved.

DEATHS SERVICE

This service, which began work in the beginning of 1941, undertook the task of looking for the missing who were presumed dead and of their identification. If requested by the French *Etat civil*, it saw to the notification of deaths to next of kin through the appropriate local authorities (Red Cross, civil or military administrations).

The work of the Deaths Service was all the more arduous and its responsibility all the greater, as investigations had to be conducted and identification to be carried out of dead, on whose bodies only the scantiest data had been found (piece of identity disc, number, sometimes a name). Use was made of inadequate or distorted information sent to Geneva by the German authorities or the local mayors : this was often merely the indication "unknown coloured man" or "unknown negro". These particulars were transcribed by the Section on cards, and were specially classified. The Deaths Service then subdivided its card-indexes according to the kind of data which reached it. Thus, there were set up in parallel fashion : an alphabetical index, an index based on countries and army numbers, and if the origin of the deceased was unknown, an index according to army numbers alone.

It may be added that all death notices, including those of PW, entailed additional investigation to ascertain the exact identity of the deceased¹.

As to the missing about whom nothing was known, the Deaths Service undertook systematic investigations ; the most successful of these was the "regimental enquiry", which was already in use in the French Section.

The illiteracy of the natives prevented their giving personal information about their missing comrades : thus, the Section turned for evidence to their French officers and NCO, preferably those whose rank brought them into closest contact with their men. The following method was employed :

¹ In particular at the French "Bureaux liquidateurs".

(1) Lists of the missing who had belonged to the same company of the same regiment were made up :

(2) With the help of the Ministry of War and of the overseas General Staffs, a search was made for the surviving officers and NCO who had commanded these companies :

(3) Each of these officers—most of them were in captivity—received a list of the missing who belonged to their unit : they were asked to supply relevant information.

These regimental enquiries helped to clarify a large number of cases of missing ; through a system of cross-checking of the testimonies received, they made it possible to recognize the routes followed by the units during the fighting. By questioning the mayors of the communes situated along these routes, unsuspected burial places were discovered, and other identifications made. Thus, the anxiety of many families was relieved, and their legal position could be established. As an example, one investigation alone resulted in the discovery of 38 graves.

The Colonial Section also carefully listed the graves throughout all the communes of France where fighting had taken place, and thus built up an index of communes which proved an invaluable aid in its work.

The most reliable means of identifying the native who has no *état civil* is information from his regiment, and in particular, his army recruiting number. For this reason it was indispensable to work in cooperation with the military authority under whose orders he had been. A special working procedure was therefore adopted : the so-called "Shuttle lists".

These were rolls bearing the names of missing combatants and the particulars available about them, arranged according to countries and regiments. They were drawn up by the General Staff in the country of origin and travelled back and forth between the Staff and Geneva, each of the parties proceeding meanwhile to make investigations, checking information with particulars already available and making notes on the lists at each passage, until the missing had been found and identified.

It should be pointed out that amongst these supposedly missing men, there were many natives who through laziness or for some other reason, had given no sign of life. Thus, in 1942, when 5,000 Tunisians were repatriated, 400 of them who had been reported as missing, landed safely in their country.

Other mistakes frequently occurred, as a result of native customs. For instance, a Moroccan who for some reason had sold or lent his coat or identity disc to a comrade, would never recover these articles from the dead body of the latter, because according to native belief, he who takes an article from the body of a man killed in battle will himself fall mortally wounded. In such cases, the inquirer was led completely astray, and the whole work of investigation and identification had to be done again.

Despite these difficulties, the majority of combatants who died on the battle-field or in captivity, and whose deaths had been notified to the Colonial Section, were identified. Thus identification was carried out for 80% of the Tunisians and 75% of the Moroccans.

Other lists, called "stateless", were established by the Section and were sent from land to land by the competent authorities of the various parts of the French Empire. They contained particulars about dead combatants whose origin was unknown, and the authorities named endeavoured to trace their own nationals.

Each of these tasks, of which the foregoing gives only a brief picture, entailed a considerable amount of investigation, checking, counter-checking and analysis.

From 1941, the Deaths Service was asked by the French *Etat civil* to notify the next of kin of the deaths of native troops which came to the Service's notice. This was done through the most appropriate channels in the countries of origin : the civil or military administration, the French Red Cross in North Africa, the Governments General or their representatives in the colonies. The number of deaths thus notified amounted to 15,149 during the war.

Besides being active from the beginning in this work of notification, the Deaths Service of the Colonial Section became an indispensable tool to the French agencies on the day when

France was completely severed from her Empire, i.e. in November 1942. For instance, a large number of native PW, released as unfit for military service, died in French hospitals between 1942 and 1945. The hospitals, which were no longer in a position to do so themselves, asked Geneva to communicate the deaths of these men to their next of kin. The same occurred in 1944, when the mortality among native PW in German hands increased considerably, as a result of the evacuation of the camps and air bombardments.

During this period, the Colonial Section was the sole link, not only between the government services in the home country and those in overseas territories, but also between these services or the next of kin, and the native PW. The Deaths Service then really took the place of the French *Etat civil*; it established temporary records, and held in Geneva the original death certificates, of which photostats only were sent to the next of kin, because of the uncertainty of postal communications. The Section showed the greatest caution in communicating to occupied France the deaths of native Gaullist soldiers, or to the countries connected with the Free French Forces, those of natives enrolled in the *Wehrmacht*, since natives were associated with every phase of the conflict in which France had a part, and were found as prisoners of war in Kenya, South Africa, the U.S.A., Italy, and even as internees in Switzerland.

The Deaths Service of the French Colonial Section was thus led to extend its activities beyond the field of the Agency proper. The disorganization in France, which deprived that country of her means of action and her archives, made it impossible for her during the war to cope with the complex and intricate task of searching for and identifying the dead amongst the native troops. Without the initiative of the ICRC, a large number of these dead would have remained nameless and their next of kin would have lived on in uncertainty.

Amongst the documents preserved in the records of the Colonial Section, not the least moving are the acknowledgments of death notices from the most remote parts of the French Empire, simply signed with a mark or a finger-print.

* * *

When France was liberated, the management of the Colonial Section got into touch with the Ministries in Paris and other offices which would be able to continue the work undertaken in Geneva during the war. The Section realized that the latter were not yet in a position to do so, and the ICRC therefore decided to continue to assist them for some further time. During the period which followed, the Secretary for the Colonies used the documentation of the Colonial Section to make out the budget of pensions and of bonuses due to former Colonial PW, and the French Red Cross in Algeria consulted its records to complete its own.

Italian Section

The Italian Section was opened on June 20, 1940, ten days after Italy's entry into the war. From the winter of 1940-1941 onwards it was extremely active, and there was to be no decrease in its work up to the end of hostilities. Both on account of the volume of work handled and the number of its staff, this became one of the Agency's most important departments.

The trend of the military operations was not the only circumstance which influenced the growth of the Section and which caused it to be confronted by new duties and ever-increasing difficulties. Certain political events also reacted profoundly on its work. It will suffice to recall the critical and dramatic events in the summer of 1943, which led to the division of Italy into two hostile camps, to imagine the intricate nature of some of the problems encountered by this Section.

The year 1943, which marked a veritable turning-point in Italian history during the war years, similarly affected the life of the Italian Section during this same period and divided it into two distinct parts.

(1) The period from June 1940 to September 8, 1943, date of the armistice concluded between Italy and the Allied Powers. During these three years, Italy, under a single government, fought on the side of Germany against the Allies. This phase was marked by a military and political situation which was more or less clear.

(2) The period from September 1943, until the capitulation of the Axis forces in Italy on May 2, 1945, during which the situation was far more complicated. The occupation by the German Army of a large part of the country, and the decla-

ration of war on Germany by the Italian Government in the south, divided Italy into two hostile camps, separated from one another by the battle front. Whereas in the south, the forces which had remained under the Government's orders resumed the fight at the side of the Allies, in the north, the Neo-Fascist Republic was set up, with the object of continuing the war on the side of the Reich.

These two main phases, covering the period of hostilities were followed by the third, the post-war period. The task of the Italian Section in connection with the repatriation of Italian prisoners—which required several months for its accomplishment—and the identification of the dead, prolonged its work for more than two years after the end of the war.

I. FROM ITALY'S ENTRY INTO THE WAR (JUNE 10, 1940)
TO THE ARMISTICE WITH THE ALLIED POWERS
(SEPTEMBER 8, 1943)

During this phase the Italian Section's method of work had to be adapted to the directions given by the Fascist Government to the *Ufficio Prigionieri di Guerra* in Rome, the official information bureau set up by the Italian Red Cross. The UPG served throughout this period principally for the receipt of information sent by the Agency regarding members of the Italian forces captured by the enemy, those who had died in enemy hands, or interned Italian civilians.

During the early months of the war, the UPG was apparently hampered by these governmental instructions, and could not take full advantage of the data received from Geneva; it was therefore unable to pass on prompt and accurate news to the next of kin. Those who know the very strong feelings of the Italian people in everything relating to family life will easily imagine the effect which this lack of news had upon the population. As they received no official notification, the relatives turned naturally to the Agency, which alone was able to relieve their anxiety; the Italian Section was thus inundated with inquiries. Whenever it could supply the required information,

it did so. This great volume of correspondence between Italian families and the Agency was, however, remarked by the Italian authorities, who were opposed to it.

After discussion with the representatives of the UPG, the ICRC was obliged to cease replying direct to families when applications met with the first official information contained in the card index. From that time, the Italian Service sent the replies to such enquiries to the UPG, which had undertaken to transmit them to the families in their original form. At the same time, the UPG still acting on the Government's instructions, conducted a vigorous campaign to persuade the Italian people to address their applications direct to its offices, and not to the Central Agency. Finally, the Italian censorship simply returned all such letters to the senders, with the request that they address their inquiries to the official Bureau in Rome. After this, the UPG reserved to itself the right to apply to the Agency, in order to complete its own particulars, and charged it to convey enquiries to the detaining Powers concerning the fate of missing combatants, or of PW who had not written for a long time.

To give an accurate idea of the evolution of the Italian Section, the principal military events in Italy should be followed in chronological order.

Summer 1940,

From the first days of the war, the Italian Section enquired into the fate of Italian airmen reported missing in the Mediterranean, of Italian merchant seamen captured by the British forces, and of Italian civilians interned in Great Britain, the Commonwealth, or British mandated territories. Following on the signature of the Franco-Italian armistice of June 24, and up to the war with Greece, the British Commonwealth was the only remaining adversary of Italy.

At the end of June, and during July 1940, Italy suffered its first naval reverses in the Mediterranean. The Section at once received large numbers of applications from next of kin of the crews of the ships which had been sunk. The names of the

survivors captured by the British were telegraphed to Geneva. These wires gave only the surname and first name and rank of the PW; in many cases the names were misspelt. The Section at once found itself confronted with very serious practical difficulties. Numerous enquiries had to be made, often by wire, in order to identify survivors and obtain some enlightenment regarding the missing. The Section then began the practice of questioning survivors regarding missing comrades.

In the summer of 1940 the Italian land forces started to attack on the confines of Libya and Egypt. They also advanced into British Somaliland, which they occupied. This was a brief period of relative calm for the Section, during which it was able to perfect its organization. From October 1940 onward, a series of naval battles took place in the Mediterranean and on October 28, 1940, Italy and Greece were at war.

The Greek Campaign (October 1940—April 1941).

The Italian forces, after initial successes, were thrust back by the Greek Army into Albanian territory, where bitter fighting ensued. Great numbers of Italians were taken prisoner. The Greek Red Cross, acting as the official information bureau, supplied Geneva with accurate and detailed PW lists, and sent thousands of messages addressed by the men to their relatives. The Italian Section, for its part, instituted yet more enquiries concerning the missing, wounded, and dead, supplied information and transmitted messages to next of kin.

In March 1941, German forces came into action on the Greek front, and shortly after the Greek Army capitulated.

Not all the Italian PW in Greek hands were released, however, when this happened. During the latter part of the hostilities the Italian officers had been removed to Crete, whence the British authorities took them to Egypt.

* * *

A large part of the Italian PW from the various theatres of war were assembled in Egypt, and afterwards transferred

to India, South Africa, Australia, or Great Britain. These removals began in 1940, and continued throughout 1941; they were pursued on an even greater scale in 1942.

The Committee's delegates in India, on their first visits to the camps, drew up lists of the Italian PW, and these were the first information received by the Agency regarding these men. Capture cards and official lists did not arrive until much later.

First British attacks in Cyrenaica

(December 1940—February 1941; November 1941—January 1942).

On December 9, 1940, the British forces attacked the Italians in the vicinity of the Egyptian border. The offensive continued until February 1941, and led to the occupation of the entire coast of Cyrenaica. In desert warfare, large numbers of PW are liable to capture as soon as the lines of communication are cut. At the end of December 1940, the first telegrams giving the names of Italian PW were received from the Prisoner of War Information Bureau, 2nd Echelon—the official British information bureau for the Middle East, opened in Cairo in October 1940¹.

There was a marked increase in the amount of information received in January 1941; during this period, the Italian Section received up to 120 telegrams in a single day, containing the names of over 10,000 PW. This information was at once dispatched to Rome, so that relatives might be informed without delay.

In order to gain a true idea of the amount of work devolving upon the Italian Section at this time, it must be remembered that these data had to be entered on cards, and the latter filed immediately, so that they might be checked with the applications for information on the index.

The cables from the official Bureau in Cairo gave neither the place, nor the date of birth of PW. These essential details were

¹ Up to this date, the Committee's delegation in Cairo had undertaken the task of collecting all available information concerning Italian PW, for transmission to the Agency.

forthcoming only when the Section received the "detailed lists" drawn up by the British authorities, and which confirmed and completed the telegrams. Unfortunately, the establishing of these lists was often delayed, owing to sudden large influxes of new PW. Postal communications were slow, and prolonged these delays still further. The information received by wire was passed on to enquiries with the necessary reservations; in the circumstances, the Section had to telegraph to Cairo for additional details in many doubtful cases. A great many enquiries were also undertaken to discover the fate of missing men whose names were not yet mentioned in the wires from the Middle East Bureau.

This Bureau kept Geneva regularly supplied with telegraphic information concerning the condition of sick or wounded PW in hospital, informing it when a sick PW was no longer "dangerously", but "seriously" ill, or vice versa. The Section sent all these data to Rome at once, likewise notifications of deaths wired to Geneva and subsequently confirmed through death certificates made out by the British authorities.

Whereas the Italian Section was concentrating all its efforts on these tasks, the first letter-bags from Italian PW to their families reached Geneva from Cairo. Up till then, mail from Italian PW in the Middle East had been held up in Egypt, as the postal authorities were unable to forward it to Italy. In the summer of 1941, the Committee's delegate in Cairo at last managed to send this mail to Switzerland, using for the purpose the special courier available to the delegation.

The Section at once took this opportunity to complete its records, and thus make up for the brevity of the original capture telegrams. The name and first name of PW writing the letter, his rank, PW number, and address in captivity, as well as his home address—a detail of particular importance for identification purposes—were entered on cards and filed. The work had to be done quickly, for there could be no delay in forwarding these letters to Italy. To deal with this extra task, the Section had to call on its staff to work overtime and arranged for night-shifts. During the next few months, more than 450,000 cards were thus filled in.

During the five years of the war, the Italian Section had to rely to a great extent on this method of establishing cards based on transit mail, in order to fill the gaps in its information, whenever official details were slow in arriving¹. The particulars thus gathered soon proved to be extremely useful as a means of reassuring applicants, for many of the messages addressed to next of kin were either lost, destroyed in bombardments, or endlessly held up by the censor. Further, as will be seen later, these cards were of great help in identifying the dead.

The second British offensive in Cyrenaica lasted from November 1941 to January 1942. Like the first campaign, it led to the capture of many Italian PW. But, since January 1941, the Italian Section had had other tasks besides that of concerning itself with Italians captured or killed in Libya.

The East African Campaign (Jan. 1941—Nov. 1941).

In January 1941, the British forces also launched an offensive in Eritrea. At the same time, they captured Italian Somaliland, liberated British Somaliland, and entered Abyssinia. In November 1941, the last Italian forces in East Africa, namely those in Gondar, laid down their arms.

The East African campaign meant a considerable increase in the work of the Section, because the forces involved were large and because many Italian civilians were resident in this area.

Serious material obstacles arose in connection with the armed forces. Postal services were extremely slow, and the Detaining Power had great difficulty, in these inaccessible regions, to arrange for information as to the number of PW and killed. At the beginning of the operations in East Africa, the task of establishing lists of Italian PW in the Sudan and Eritrea fell to the Middle East Bureau. Later an official Bureau was established in Nairobi (Kenya)², which undertook the

¹ Later, the Section resorted to this method when Germany refused to supply the names of Italian military internees (see below, p. 233).

² H. Q. 2nd Echelon, East Africa Command.

registration of PW¹. Later on, the military authorities in Kenya took over part of the PW, who up till then had been subordinate to Middle East Command. Thus, to trace Italians missing in East Africa, the Italian Section had to approach simultaneously the official Cairo Bureau, the Bureau in Nairobi, and even, in some cases, the Committee's Delegation in India, since some PW were sent to that country without being quoted in the "detailed lists".

The Italian Service soon had to deal also with Italian civilians. Direct communications between Italy and its East African possessions were cut. Accordingly, the Italian Red Cross asked the Agency to serve as intermediary for the forwarding of vast quantities of "civilian messages" to the settlers in East Africa. When these messages, with the reply, found their way back to Geneva, the Italian Section recorded on particular file cards the names and addresses of those sending replies. This was necessary, because many Italian civilians in East Africa had moved, owing to the military operations, and it was important to note their new addresses.

Thus, it was possible not only to keep track of these civilians, but also to trace the whereabouts of service-men reported as missing. The Italian settlers almost all belonged to the militia, and not to the regular army, and had with them in East Africa the usual militia kit. During the 1941 campaign, they were called up and enlisted in the regular armed forces. Thus, the confusion was often twofold: the enquiry from the official Bureau in Rome gave the Army number, whilst next of kin were looking for the same man under his former civilian address. Moreover, the British authorities classified the men in their lists (according as they were taken in uniform or in civilian dress), either as PW, in which case their Army number was given, or as "civilian internees", when, of course, they gave no information that could lead to their identification as members of the armed forces. Further, the British had left at liberty a certain number of Italians who were needed for carrying on the

¹ This Bureau, unlike the Cairo Office, did not announce captures by wire, but sent "provisional lists.", followed later by "detailed lists".

public services. When the population of East Africa was finally evacuated, these Italians were often able to choose the manner of internment they preferred, by reverting to their uniform if they thought it advantageous to be treated as PW.

In these unsettled circumstances, the utility of the information gained in transit from the messages coming from East Africa will readily be imagined.

Later, the British authorities removed the greater part of the Italian population of East Africa to civilian internee camps in Eritrea, Kenya, Tanganyika and Rhodesia, and sent the Agency lists of all these persons. About 10,000 Italian women, children, and old people were repatriated to Italy in the course of 1942 and 1943.

To carry out these duties, the staff of the Italian Section had to be greatly increased ; between the end of 1940 and December 31, 1941, it rose from nine to 110 workers. In addition, the Section resorted increasingly to the services of the Auxiliary Sections working for the Agency in various Swiss towns.

The Russian Campaign (1941-1943).

The Italian Expeditionary Corps, which went into action in the Ukraine on August 7, 1941, suffered its first reverses in the month of December, from which time its losses were considerable.

The Italian Section was overwhelmed with enquiries ; but no information was forthcoming with regard to Italian PW taken in the U.S.S.R., and it was unfortunately unable to give next of kin any news. All the Section could do was to file these applications, little guessing how valuable they would prove to be, later on, for the purpose of identifying the dead¹.

Spring and Summer of 1942.

From the military point of view, this period was characterized in Africa by the great offensive undertaken by the Axis forces, which was halted only at El Alamein, 90 kilometers from Alexandria, at the beginning of July.

¹ See below, p. 240.

During the first half of 1942, mass transfers of Italian PW took place within the British Commonwealth. The Italian Section had to deal with numerous lists referring to these removals.

Furthermore, naval warfare in the Mediterranean was intensified, and many ships of the Italian Navy and merchant marine were sunk, leading to an influx of enquiries concerning missing seamen.

It was not only the next of kin in the homeland who were anxious for news ; the PW likewise were worried by the lack of news from their families—the delays in the transmission of PW mail increased steadily—and were constantly appealing to the Agency, in an attempt to get information of some kind. These appeals became still more pressing when Italy began to experience heavy air bombardments.

The ICRC now succeeded in securing the extension to Italian PW of the system of "capture cards", with retrospective effect. Hundreds of thousands of these cards then began to arrive in Geneva, and constituted a most valuable source of information for the Italian Section. Unhappily, illiterate PW entrusted to others the task of filling out their cards, with the result that the information given was often incorrect. Other PW were barely able to write ; their names were almost illegible and spelling mistakes plentiful. This made classification of the cards in the index a long and difficult matter.

From the Battle of El Alamein to the Armistice with the Allies
(Nov. 1942 to Sept. 1943).

At the end of October 1942, the British Eighth Army, after breaking through the Axis front at El Alamein, advanced into Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, and reached Tunisia in January 1943, taking large numbers of PW in the process.

Meanwhile, on November 8, 1942, the Allied landings took place in French North Africa, and were followed shortly afterwards by the appearance of Free French forces and the entry of Axis troops into Tunisia.

Up to that time, the Italian Section had, as a rule, dealings with only one group of Detaining Powers, the British Common-

wealth, which supplied it with information through five main official Bureaux¹.

After the establishment of a combat zone in Tunisia the Section had dealings with two new Detaining States, the U.S.A. and Free France. Thus, the Italian PW were more than ever dispersed. In order to trace a man reported missing on the African front during this period, the Italian Section—failing receipt of official lists, which reached Geneva only after long delays—had to enquire in four different places : (a) the official Bureau in London, which listed the names of PW captured by the British First Army ; (b) the official Middle East Bureau, in Cairo, which recorded the PW taken by the British Eighth Army ; (c) the official Prisoner of War Information Bureau, in Washington ; and (d) the French authorities in Algiers, through the intermediary of the Committee's delegation in that city.

The Italian Section had to adapt itself rapidly to the various methods of work employed by the Detaining Powers ; at the same time, the sudden quickening of the pace of events called for ever-increasing efforts. Shiploads of Italian reinforcements were sunk before reaching the African coast, and large masses of Italian troops fell into hands of the Allies, following on the capitulation of the Axis forces round Tunis in May, 1943 ; the Allied offensive was resumed almost at once (capture of the islands of Pantelleria and Lampedusa in June, and landing in Sicily on July 10).

As the number of PW and missing grew rapidly, a great mass of enquiries reached Geneva. As the result of Government prohibition to write direct to the Agency, the Italians made arrangements with relatives or correspondents in Switzerland and overseas countries to transmit their applications to Geneva.

Whilst the fight was raging in Sicily, the Fascist regime collapsed, on July 26, 1943. On September 3, Allied forces disembarked on the mainland in Calabria, and a few days later, on September 8, an armistice was concluded between the Italian Government and the Allied Powers.

¹ Prisoners of War Information Bureau, London ; H. Q. 2nd Echelon, Cairo ; East Africa Command, Nairobi ; South African Red Cross, Johannesburg (acting as the official South African Bureau) ; Prisoners of War Information Bureau in Melbourne, Australia.

II. FROM THE ARMISTICE WITH THE ALLIED POWERS (SEPT. 8, 1943) TO THE CAPITULATION OF THE AXIS FORCES IN NORTHERN ITALY (MAY 2, 1945)

On the conclusion of the armistice, German forces occupied the greater part of Italy and disarmed the Italian units stationed in Italy, France, Yugoslavia, Greece, and the Dodecanese. The Italian fleet succeeded—though not without loss—in reaching Allied ports, in accordance with the orders of the Government, now established in southern Italy.

After the creation of the Neo-Fascist State, the Germans proceeded to "screen" the disarmed Italian troops. Those who declared their willingness to serve the Neo-Fascist State were enlisted in the new army formed to fight against the Allies, whilst all the others were removed to internment camps in Germany, Poland, and the Balkans. Many Italian service-men had managed to get away and join their families during the confusion which followed the armistice, and the Germans organized a systematic search, to round up the able-bodied men for deportation to Germany as civilian workers.

The Problem of the Italian Military Internees (I.M.I.)

At first it looked as though the 700,000 Italian service-men interned by the Germans would be treated as PW, thus coming under the provisions of the 1929 Convention. The Italian Section actually received nearly 200,000 capture cards between Dec. 1943 and Jan. 1944. But no more came after that date. When the Committee's delegate expressed surprise at this silence, and asked for information concerning the situation of these men, the German authorities replied that they were not PW, but "military internees", and that the question was an internal matter, to be settled direct between the German Government and the Neo-Fascist Republic. Consequently, the Committee's delegates were not allowed to visit the camps in which these men were interned.

Lengthy negotiations had to be undertaken by the ICRC, in order that the IMI, as well as the conscripted Italian workers, might at least be allowed to make use of the "civilian message" system to send news to their relatives. From February 1944, onwards, hundreds of thousands of these messages were received by the agency. Before transmitting them, the Italian Section rapidly took note of the information they contained, for recording in its files. This involved a considerable amount of work, but it enabled the Section to give reassuring news to the many Italian families who had been evacuated, owing to military operations and bombing, and whom Civilian Messages could not reach.

In January 1944 a separate Office was set up at the Italian Embassy, in Berlin¹. This Office refused to supply any information to the Agency, and gave it only to the Neo-Fascist Government. In July 1944, upon the urgent representations of the Committee's delegation in Berlin, the Office stated that there was a card-index in Verona containing the names of 300,000 interned Italian service-men, which it would place at the disposal of the Committee. The latter, however, never succeeded in procuring this information.

It should be remembered that, counting the 700,000 I.M.I., the volunteer civilian workers, and the conscripted workers, the Germans were holding in all nearly 1,300,000 Italians, i. e. three times the total number of Italian PW in Allied hands. The difficulties confronting the Italian Section, which was overwhelmed with applications and had at its disposal only the scantiest of details, will be readily understood.

During the summer of 1944, the I.M.I. were converted into civilian workers employed in war industries, or in the "Todt" organization; they had to work in the zones most exposed to Allied bombing. The death-rate among them was thus extremely high. The German authorities gave the Agency no official certificates concerning deaths². Generally speaking, the only

¹ "Militär- und Zivilinternierten-Betreuungs-Dienststelle".

² Notifications of deaths were sent by the Berlin office to Verona, and were not communicated to next of kin.

notice which the relatives received of these deaths were messages sent back from Germany and marked with a cross, or bearing simply the word "deceased". The Italian Section instituted enquiries through camp leaders, who at once supplied the required data concerning the deceased. The German authorities, observing this correspondence, ordered the camp commandants and camp leaders to furnish no information, except to the above-named office in Berlin.

Yet other tasks were soon to be laid on the Italian Section. The programme was already a heavy one, since it included the problem of the IMI, the enquiries concerning men missing in Tunisia and Sicily, and the following up of the movements of PW consequent upon their transfer from one Detaining Power to another.

Division of Italy into two Zones.

From September 1943, Italy was divided into two distinct zones—the Southern Zone, under Allied control, and the Northern Zone, in the hands of the German and Neo-Fascists forces. The boundary between these two zones gradually moved northward, as the Allies slowly progressed. At the beginning of the winter of 1943-1944, the front was in the neighbourhood of Cassino and the Sangro, where it remained during several months of bitter local fighting.

Because of this dividing line, the Agency was henceforward the only body able to act as intermediary between the two zones. Until the end of the war, the Italian Section maintained the contact between PW in Allied hands and their relatives in the northern Zone, and between the IMI and Italian workers in Germany, or in German-controlled territories, and their relatives living in the southern Zone.

The official Bureau in Rome was unable to communicate with the southern part of the country. Abandoning the position it had taken in 1941, it requested the Agency in January 1944, to transmit to families in southern Italy, through the municipal authorities, notifications concerning the deaths of Italians

killed on the Russian front, according to evidence furnished by their comrades returned from Russia.

In order to ensure the transmission of this information and, in general, of all the communications and messages addressed to the southern Zone and to PW in Allied hands, the ICRC instituted the following routing system :—from the German-controlled areas the mail travelled by post to Geneva, thence by truck to Marseilles. From here it was conveyed by one of the Committee's ships to Lisbon, where it was taken over by Allied military planes ; these flew to Algiers, whence the mail travelled to its various destinations. When Naples was liberated, the Delegation in that city served as a relay station for the whole of southern Italy.

Mail for the northern zone and also for Germany and other parts of Europe under German control followed the same route, in the opposite direction.

The events of September 1943 led many Italians, both military personnel and civilians, to seek refuge in Switzerland. The Agency did its best for these persons also and took all steps to notify—as discreetly as possible—their families in Italy¹. The Italian Section did likewise for the families of members of the garrison in the Dodecanese, who had sought refuge in Turkey at this time.

Furthermore, at the close of the year 1943, about 60,000 Italian Jews were arrested for racial motives in Central and Northern Italy, and detained in Italian prisons and camps ; they were deported afterwards to Buchenwald, Auschwitz, etc.² Enquiries poured in, but the Section received no information from the German authorities regarding these deportees. Many Italians were also arrested for political reasons and deported chiefly to the camps of Mauthausen and Dachau, and the Italian Section was kept in complete darkness concerning their fate.

Lastly, it should be recalled that many Italian service-men who had gone into hiding to escape internment by the Germans,

¹ Italians interned in Switzerland came under the Agency's " Swiss Internment Section ", and not under the Italian Section.

² Several thousand Jews seeking to escape this menace sought refuge in Switzerland.

as well as civilians who had managed to avoid enlistment in labour battalions, and young men of the 1923, 1924 and 1925 classes, called up by the Neo-Fascist Army, had joined the underground movement, thus swelling the ranks of the Resistance Forces which had been formed in the German-occupied zone. The Italian Section received no particulars concerning the fate of these "partisans", who fell into the hands of the Germans, and thus was unable to give any news to relatives.

The front, which was stationary since January 1944, was in motion again in May of the same year, and on June 4 the Allies entered Rome.

In December 1943, the Neo-Fascist Government had set up a second official Information Bureau at Aprica (province of Sondrio), in Northern Italy, which began work shortly after the fall of Rome. On July 1, 1944, this Bureau asked to be treated by the ICRC on the same footing as the Bureau remaining in Rome, and wished to receive copies of all communications sent to Rome by the Agency. Obviously, this system of duplicating all communications added greatly to the work of the Italian Section, which was now beginning to receive numerous enquiries and applications for information from the Aprica Bureau.

Meanwhile, the Allies had liberated the greater part of France. Italians serving with German units in France or conscripted by the "Todt" organization to work on the coastal fortifications, were taken by the Allies¹. The Italian Section received lists of men taken prisoner by regular French troops, by the F.F.I., and by British or American forces.

At this time the American and British authorities, wishing to make the best use of Italian labour for the benefit of the Allied war effort, proposed that these Italians should be granted the status of "co-operators", which gave them considerable advantages. Thus, lists of "co-operators" in France, the U.S.A., Great Britain, the Middle East, etc. began to reach the Italian Section.

¹ Among these men enlisted in the "Todt" organization were many former IMI.

The Allied advance in Italy, which progressed rapidly during the summer of 1944, slowed down in October, and the front remained stationary during the winter months along a line passing south of Spezia and Bologna. Italy was now divided into three sections :

- (a) The southern zone, namely Central and Southern Italy, under Allied control.
- (b) The fairly extensive zone which included the fighting area and the rear on either side. This entire region was quite inaccessible as regards correspondence and the transmission of news.
- (c) The northern zone controlled by the Germans.

In April, 1945, the front was again in movement, and after a few weeks of fighting the German forces in Italy capitulated on May 2.

Throughout the entire Italian campaign, the Section had to follow the progress of operations with the greatest care, in order to find the most suitable routes for forwarding mail to the various zones.

By the summer of 1944, the Section reached its peak ; its staff, which numbered 158 workers on June 30, 1944, still stood at 129 on April 30, 1945.

Before dealing with the post-war period, it should be mentioned that, throughout the war, the Italian Section was called upon the enter upon numerous enquiries and investigations relating to civilians who were free. Italian emigration has led to the formation of numerous large colonies of Italians in various parts of the world, particularly in North and South America. Members of these colonies, cut off from their native country and deprived of news of their relatives, frequently applied to the Agency to trace members of their family whom their messages had failed to reach.

III. POST-WAR PERIOD. — REPATRIATION OF PRISONERS AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE DEAD

Repatriation of Prisoners

The advance of the Allied armies through Germany and Austria in 1945 led to the release of former IMI. These the Germans had gradually been transferring from the east towards the west, in the face of the advancing Soviet forces. These men remained, however, during many months in the hands of the occupying authorities, and their repatriation, which was considerably delayed owing to the destruction of railways and bridges, began only in the autumn of 1945. The Agency tried to relieve the anxiety of relatives by broadcasting the names of the released, as well as those of former deportees who had survived the concentration camps.

The repatriation of the Italian from overseas took even longer, owing to the scarcity of shipping. Postal services were still irregular and slow in many areas, and both relatives and PW continued to write to Geneva for news.

In the summer of 1945, the Agency considered that the Allied Authorities would now be able to transmit information concerning PW direct to the official Italian Bureau, and decided to abandon the work of indexing the particulars taken from the lists of repatriates. The work of the Section thus gradually decreased. Nevertheless, eighteen months after the end of hostilities, the number of men awaiting repatriation was still nearly 200,000. We need feel no surprise, therefore, that the Section had to pursue—on a reduced scale, naturally—its various work for PW and internees. It was, in particular, concerned about the Italians taken by the Yugoslav forces. Lists showing the names of some 10,000 PW arrived from Belgrade at the end of 1945, and the Section passed on this information to next of kin.

Identification of the Dead

As was stated above, the deaths of Italian military personnel and civilian internees in Germany were not notified to the Agency. After the war, however, the official Italian Bureau received from various sources a great many notifications of this kind. As, however, the information given was for the most part incomplete or incorrect (names misspelt, address of next of kin omitted, etc.), the Bureau asked the Italian Section for help in the difficult task of identifying the dead.

The Section agreed to this request, and reverted to the cards made out when the IMI messages to next of kin passed through the Agency in transit, and also to the cards based on letters or messages addressed to IMI and returned from Germany with a cross, or the word "deceased". Finally, all the various kinds of information assembled in its files was scrutinised. By the end of 1947, the Section had succeeded in identifying and supplying the home address of 90% of the cases submitted to it.

Further, the official Bureau in Rome had received from Italians repatriated from Russia statements concerning the death of some of their fellow PW. Such evidence rarely included the address of the families. While there was no official information concerning men who had fallen, or who were captured in Russia, the Section had kept a card-index of all the applications for information received since 1941. The relatives' address was noted on these cards ; this information was passed on to the Rome Bureau, and the latter was thus enabled in a great many cases to get in touch with the next of kin.

During more than two years after the end of hostilities the Italian Section, working in close co-operation with the official Bureau continued this work of identification. This task was indispensable, firstly, to put an end to the suspense of the dead men's relatives, and also in order to settle the latter's legal and financial status.

* * *

Technical difficulties encountered by the Italian Section.

After this review of the principal phases of the Section's activities, we can examine more closely some of the technical difficulties met with in connection with the identifying of PW and deceased.

One of the main obstacles arose from the system of military numbering used in the Italian Army. In Italy, each military district (recruiting centre) had its own military recording and numbering system. Each man's identity disc bore his individual number, preceded by a number, in brackets, representing the district. Thus, two men from different districts might have the same individual number. If the district was not mentioned in the particulars furnished to the Agency, or in the applications received, the individual number, in cases of duplication of names and in the absence of any other data, was worthless as a means of identification. Moreover, the military districts had destroyed their archives after 1943, at the approach of the enemy; thus, there was no means of verifying registration numbers at the recruiting centres.

The PW registration number might to some extent have served in place of the Army number, but was hardly more reliable. To take the case of transfers alone, the lists reaching Geneva gave only the name, first name and PW number of the men to be transferred; the numbers were frequently wrong or interchanged. These men were given new numbers in their new place of detention, since each area—in the British Commonwealth, at least—had its own numbering system. Lists announcing the arrival of PW in a new detention zone, but giving only the new PW number and not the former number, made it frequently impossible to identify the men until the more detailed lists had been forwarded. The Section was thus obliged to institute enquiries in all urgent cases¹.

¹ Some Italian PW in Allied hands even exchanged numbers with others, in the hope of being transferred to another area or, on the contrary, to avoid such transfers. The men were informed of these transfers not under their names, but under their PW numbers.

As both the Army number and the PW number proved unreliable as a means of distinguishing namesakes, the Italian Section attached particular importance to the names and addresses of parents or wives. Here again, many difficulties arose.

For instance, it is a common practice in Italy for a married woman to sign letters with her maiden name, without mentioning her husband's name. Since women writing to Geneva often quoted only the first name of the son or husband for whom they were enquiring, the resulting complications can easily be imagined.

Again, dialects are still in frequent use in Italy, and relatives often employed such dialects in making their requests. Family names and place names were often so distorted as to be unrecognizable. The PW likewise, on their capture cards, frequently gave information which was just as inaccurate. The official lists themselves were drawn up on the basis of forms filled in by the PW and often reproduced these mistakes.

As an instance of the degree of similarity which sometimes occurred between identifying elements, we may mention that the Section received one day an enquiry concerning a serviceman for whom the card index gave two different PW addresses. The Section enquired in order to find out which of the addresses was correct. It was then discovered that there were in reality two men, each having the same name and first name, born on the same day of the same year in the same town of Sicily, and whose fathers, both living in the same town, had the same first name. The two men, moreover, belonged to the same unit, and were captured on the same day in the same battle. It was only thanks to their mother's name that they could be distinguished.

From this it will be seen that even the mention of the father's first name—a matter of paramount importance in Italy—may not suffice to identify a man with certainty, and that indication of the mother's maiden name and first name—likewise of great importance—then becomes the sole determining factor.

If identification of the living was often difficult, that of the dead was still more so. The Italian Section did not overlook any possible source of information in this field, and thus began the practice of examining the personal belongings of Italian

soldiers killed in battle, or of deceased PW, which the official Bureaux of several detaining States had sent to the Agency. In view of the increasing uncertainty of means of transport, it had been decided at the end of 1943 to keep these articles in trust at Geneva until the end of the war. Thanks to the careful scrutiny of all this property, the Italian Section succeeded in identifying a great many of the dead, and was thus able, through the official Italian Bureau, to inform next of kin, who otherwise might perhaps have remained in doubt for several years more.

The Italian Section's card index of casualties was in all respects a valuable source of information for the official Bureau in Rome, and the latter constantly referred to it to supplement its own data.

Greek Section

The outbreak of hostilities between Italy and Greece on October 28, 1940, made it necessary for the Central Agency to set up a Greek Section. It began work early in November.

At first, the duties of the Greek Section were to collect and send on to the Greek Red Cross, which was serving as the Greek Information Bureau, details of Greek PW captured in the winter and spring of 1940-1941, and of civilians interned in Axis territory. An armistice was concluded on April 23, 1941 and during the four years that followed when Greece was occupied by Italian, German and Bulgarian forces the Section dealt with the various classes, military and civilian, of persons who had been captured or detained; it acted as intermediary for messages, and in response to requests made a great many enquiries.

The number of PW was relatively small. It will be recalled that the Greeks kept the initiative during the winter campaign of 1940-41, and that the troops surrounded in Epirus and Macedonia, who surrendered on April 23, 1941, were set free, in fulfilment of the terms of the armistice concluded with the Wehrmacht at Salonica. Further, prisoners from the Ionian Islands and, on this account, considered to be prospective Italian nationals, were also released. In the same way, release was given to those who came from territory claimed by Bulgaria.

A great number of Greek officers and men left Greece secretly at the beginning of the occupation to join up with the Allied forces in the Middle East. Greek units were formed which took part, for example, in the Libyan campaign. The Greek Section had the work of tracing men from these units who fell

in action, were taken prisoner or were missing. The Greek Navy also left Greek waters at the time of the occupation, to place the fleet at the disposal of the Allies. That led later to the capture of Greek sailors, particularly in Africa and the Far East. Numbers of Greeks who lived in France, Great Britain or the United States enlisted in the forces of these countries and fought on various fronts, in particular the Western Front in 1944. That fact explains the presence of Greek PW in German camps.

When the armistice was signed in September 1943, between Italy and the Allies, a great many Greek prisoners were transferred by the German army from camps in Italy to others in Germany. A few hundreds, however, managed to escape to Switzerland, where they were interned. Events that followed in Italy brought a steady flow of enquiries to the Central Agency from PW's next of kin, who were without news.

A great part of the Greek Section's activities concerned men of the Greek Merchant Service, which sailed all the seas. Before the war, the Greek merchant marine numbered over 600 vessels, totalling nearly two million tons ; also many vessels sailing under other flags had Greek crews. The Section received a great many enquiries regarding these seamen, and this led to an exchange of correspondence with the British and American Red Cross Societies. To aid the searches, a card index was set up for all vessels manned by Greek crews. The cards recorded all information received on the vessels concerned, the names of members of the crews who were the subject of enquiry, the steps taken for tracing them and the replies received. By referring to the crew lists contained in the index, the Section was frequently able to open an enquiry on a missing seaman in the home port where one of his comrades was known to be. This index of ships was, in every respect, an invaluable aid to the work in the Section.

The political detainees in the hands of the occupying forces and the civilian workers did not involve much work for the Section ; the Greek Jews, on the other hand, were a source of much concern. The greater number of these Jews lived, before the war in Salonica, where they formed a large colony. During

the war, almost all Greek Jews were deported, and the Section received over 8,000 enquiries. Corresponding requests were sent to the German Red Cross as to the fate of these deportees, but with one or two exceptions the enquiries proved fruitless.

* * *

All enquiries made in Greece were forwarded by the Section to the Greek Red Cross Society, acting as the official Information Bureau, and to whom all praise is due for the scrupulous care which they gave to this arduous task. In turn, the Greek Red Cross transmitted a great many enquiries from Greece to the Central Agency. The joint efforts of the two organizations were helped by the presence in Geneva of a permanent delegate of the Greek Red Cross.

It may be said that it was not the number, but the difficulty and intricacy of the enquiries that characterised the task of the Greek Section. Owing to the fact that the Detaining Powers were also the occupying Powers, enquiries of a simple nature could be dealt with locally.

During the occupation, the Greek Section was indeed a link between Greece and the numerous colonies of Greek nationals in many parts of the world, in particular Constantinople, Egypt, South Africa, the United States, the Argentine, Australia, and a constant interchange of enquiries passed through Geneva.

All civilian messages concerning Greek seamen were sent to the Greek Section from the Civilian Message Section. The Greek Section, with the aid of its card index of ships, was alone able to send on the messages. It also sorted all civilian messages for Greece in geographical order, according to the zones of occupation. In many cases, the messages only bore the name (sometimes mutilated) of a small village, a district or street of a town unnamed, and only persons familiar with the language and geography of the country were able to complete the addresses.

Whereas geographical difficulties were frequent in the Greek Section, the language question was a still greater obstacle. As the cards could not be made out in Greek script, the Section had

recourse to an exact method of transcribing names in Latin characters and adopting special filing methods. The only means of transcribing, filing and tracing cards, without risk of error or duplication, was by using these methods, devised by a specialist in Modern Greek. The principal organizations with which the Greek Section was in contact, in particular the Greek Red Cross, adopted this system of transcribing names.

Further difficulties were due to the phonetic spelling of Greek names by correspondents in Italy and America. The first step to be taken was to give these names the standard spelling. For instance " HALCHIDIS " and " CUCIUMPIS " (Italian spelling) had to be altered to " CHALKIDIS " and " KOUTSOUMBIS ", and " CHAKOUS " and " QURKUVASELES " (American spelling) were rectified as " TSAKAOS " and " KOURKOUVASSILIS ".

These examples show the custom adopted by many emigrants to adapt their names to the countries where they settle. A great many Greeks in the United States simplified their names by abbreviation, " Americanization " or translation¹. As an instance of the difficulty caused by this practice, we mention the case of a PW who signed " Tom ESLER " but who wrote to explain that his real name, in Greek, was " Anastassios ASLANIS ".

Throughout the war the mail in this Section was precarious. Postal communications between Geneva and Greece were cut off, and although the Section took advantage of all means open to the ICRC, it frequently occurred that weeks, and even months passed by without mail being received from, or sent to Greece.

Members of the Greek Section were not many in number, the average staff during the War years was five, the highest figure being nine in 1944 ; their work quickly decreased at the end of the War and finished in 1946.

¹ See page 105.

Yugoslav Section

The Yugoslav Section was opened on May 1, 1941, after the war had extended to Yugoslavia. Owing to the general trend of hostilities in that country it was impossible for the Section to act regularly as an intermediary for the transmission of official information. Its role was therefore chiefly that of an agency for the exchange of news between next of kin.

At the outset, the Yugoslav Section was faced with a complex situation. After a brief resistance, the Yugoslav army capitulated on April 17 before the Axis Powers¹, and the country was totally occupied by the enemy. In addition to the German and Italian zones of occupation, there were Hungarian and Bulgarian zones. The frontier areas had been annexed, and what remained of Yugoslavia was divided into two new States : "Free Croatia" and the "Serbian State". Moreover, the former Government had sought refuge abroad.

During the first period of its existence, the Section received a great number of capture cards from Germany, and PW lists from Italy ; by the end of 1941, it was in possession of the names of most of the Yugoslav PW held by these two States.

As Yugoslavia was now completely cut off, the Section at once received from practically every quarter of the globe applications relating to combatants presumed to be PW in Axis hands, and concerning civilians resident in Yugoslavia. It therefore soon had to undertake enquiries with the appropriate national Red Cross Societies, and here the difficulties began.

As a result of the situation to which the country was reduced,

¹ The attack by the Axis Powers began on April 6.

there were no less than seven national Red Cross Societies whom these investigations might concern : the German, Italian, Hungarian, Bulgarian and Albanian Red Cross Societies, and two temporary bodies, the Serbian Red Cross in Belgrade and the Croatian Red Cross in Zagreb. Lastly, a Yugoslav Red Cross Committee had been set up in London.

The Section had only vague and incomplete indications as to the extent of the territories in which each of these organizations could work, as information was confined to occasional reports published in the press. These territories were, moreover, constantly changing¹. It was extremely difficult to determine exactly which of the national Red Cross Societies was competent for any given place. In many cases, letters addressed to small localities situated in ill-defined frontier areas were returned to Geneva by the Red Cross Societies of the two neighbouring occupants, both stating their inability to deal with such mail.

Moreover, in spite of every attempt, a large number of PW were never able to obtain news of their relatives in Yugoslavia. There were several reasons for this : firstly, the constant displacement of the guerillas and of their activities, particularly in Croatia, which prevented all postal connections ; secondly, the persecutions inflicted on the Serbian population in Croatian territory, which led to the exodus of the inhabitants towards Serbian areas under German occupation. Lastly, the deportation of populations and the transfer of civilian workers, which defeated every attempt at obtaining news.

We can here give only a faint idea of the constant difficulties with which the Yugoslav Section had to contend in carrying out enquiries. The following schedule of enquiries carried out since its opening shows, however, that positive results were achieved in many instances.

¹ The situation was as follows: Germany had annexed part of Slovenia with Maribor, and occupied a large extent of Serbia, including the Banat. Italy had annexed the rest of Slovenia with Ljubljana, and a large portion of the Yugoslavia coastline with Susak, Split, Sibenik, etc. She occupied a considerable part of the new Croatian State behind the coastline, together with Montenegro. A part of Yugoslav Macedonia

Object of search	Number of enquiries from 1. 1. 41 to 30. 6. 47	Positive results
Service Men and Civilian Internees	6,414	1,463
Sundry Civilians (deported, non-interned civilians, etc.)	13,144	5,390
Total	19,558	6,853

By July 1941, a new element had entered the picture : resistance movements appeared, followed shortly by the reconstitution of organized armed forces. These at once attacked the forces of the occupant and of the Croatian State. The engagements led to fresh captures and more deaths amongst Yugoslav combatants.

After the armistice concluded in September 1943 between Italy and the Allies, the German forces disarmed and interned Italian forces stationed in Yugoslavia. Dalmatia was attached to the Croatian State, and the remainder of the Yugoslav provinces, which had been annexed or occupied by the Italians, came under German occupation.

* * *

To a greater extent than for PW, the fate of civilian internees, deportees and displaced civilians was a concern to the Section ; in this field its means of action were extremely limited.

The areas of Yugoslavia where the populations suffered most severely by collective deportation were Serbia and Slovenia ; a fair proportion of the population of the latter district had been taken to Germany. The Section was also informed of the existence in Norway of civilian internee camps, where a large number of Yugoslav partisans had been deported.

The Agency never received any lists of internees or deportees from German sources, and the attempts of the Section in behalf of these civilians were unavailing. The difficulties in respect of

had been attached to Albania and, like the latter, occupied by Italy. Hungary had annexed the Medjumurje and the Backa. Bulgaria, in turn, had occupied a portion of Eastern Serbia and the larger part of Yugoslav Macedonia.

the internees held by the Croatian authorities were likewise very great. These authorities considered such internees as political prisoners, and the Section never received any lists of the Croatian camps, the existence of which came to their knowledge only through letters from relatives. Practically complete lists were however received from the Italians, towards the end of the war.

Although, at the outbreak of war, Yugoslavia despite its 15 million inhabitants included only 70,000 Jews, the Section received a large number of enquiries from Jewish next of kin in all parts of the world. Enquiries about Jews residing in the provinces occupied by Germany were unfortunately always fruitless.

Three Jewish camps were known to be situated in Serbia. The detainees, who had been quartered there temporarily, were afterwards taken to an unknown destination, and nothing further was ever heard of them. In addition, a large number of Jews interned in Croatia were deported to Auschwitz, Kattowitz and other concentration camps. No news was ever received from them again.

* * *

In August 1944, as a result of steps taken by the ICRC with the German Authorities, lists of Yugoslav prisoners in the camps in Germany were drawn up by the spokesmen and sent to Geneva. Most of these lists were received by January 1945, but the remainder never arrived, in consequence of the situation in Germany.

At the end of 1944, postal connections were established anew between the Agency and the Yugoslav Red Cross in Belgrade, via Marseilles and Rome. Thousands of messages addressed to PW in Germany, and which had been sent off before the liberation, then reached the Section.

From May 1945, after the liberation of Yugoslavia and the establishment of fresh postal connections with Belgrade, the work of the Section diminished considerably.

As the PW and deportees could not be repatriated immediately after the armistice, lists of about 18,000 Yugoslav PW and civilian deportees who had been liberated by the Allied

forces were broadcast to their relatives and friends, by means of the ICRC broadcasts, for which the Yugoslav Section had to make arrangements.

From the autumn of 1946, the chief task of the Section was to draw up and despatch certificates of captivity to former prisoners of war.

The filing of the Yugoslav card-index was beset with difficulties. These were mainly caused by the mixture of Cyrillic and Latin characters in the original documents, in particular the capture cards, and the juxtaposition of Serbo-Croat, German and Italian spellings. Distortion of names, which was very frequent, did not make the task of the filing-clerks any easier. Strict observation of precise filing rules, which had been drafted in a handbook prepared by specialists of the Serbo-Croat language, enabled these difficulties to be overcome.

When the work was at its peak, the personnel of the Section amounted to fifteen.

Russian Section

Despite the fact that the USSR had only ratified the Geneva Convention for the Relief of the Sick and Wounded and was not amongst the States which had signed the 1929 Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, the day after the outbreak of war between Germany and Russia the ICRC informed the Government of the Soviet Union that it was fully prepared to collect and transmit information on the wounded and on PW on the Eastern front. The USSR accepted this proposal in principle as regards PW, and declared its willingness to supply information on PW captured by Soviet forces, in so far as the States at war with the USSR observed the same rule.

The countries at war with Russia, to whom the ICRC made the same proposal, gave a reply similar to that of the USSR. Subsequently, the Soviet Government also agreed to the Committee's scheme to open an office in Ankara for receiving and relaying information on PW on behalf of the Central Agency. A delegate of the Committee got into touch with the Soviet Embassy in Turkey to make this arrangement¹. It was thus hoped that, in respect of exchange of information, men captured on the Eastern front would have the benefit of the Committee's help. The Central Agency, therefore, installed the Russian Section on September 1, 1941.

In October and November 1941, the ICRC transmitted to the Soviet Government, by the intermediary of its delegate in Ankara and of the Soviet Embassy in that town, the first lists

¹ For details on these negotiations see Vol. I, Part III, chap. II.

of Russian PW which had meanwhile reached the Central Agency, but the Moscow Official Bureau, the establishment of which the Soviet Embassy in Ankara had announced, forwarded no list of PW in Russian hands in exchange. The majority of the States at war with Russia argued that failure of reciprocity released them from any obligation and ceased to forward names of Russian PW to the Agency.

The contact established in this field between the Committee and the Soviet authorities was thus interrupted, and the hope that the Agency might act as intermediary for exchange of news between prisoners taken on the Eastern front and their next of kin gradually faded.

The Russian Section was therefore in a peculiar position. As no information arrived from official sources, its scope was very limited. Also, it remained out of touch with the Moscow Official Bureau. It, nevertheless, kept up a certain activity ; this was due mainly to the fact that the Rumanian Government continued to send lists of Soviet prisoners in its hands. About 75,000 names came in from Rumania, and apparently covered the total number of Russian PW in that country. Other countries at war with the USSR sent the names of 4,500 Russian PW taken by them¹.

The Section received information from other sources which, while less important, nevertheless proved very valuable, on account of the silence surrounding the fate of Soviet prisoners. The following among these sources may be mentioned :

(1) A certain number of Russian prisoners who had escaped from Germany and Italy into Switzerland and who gave the names of comrades still in captivity².

(2) Messages sent to relatives by PW, mostly from Finland, and some from Rumania and Italy.

¹ 3,000 names were sent in by the Finnish authorities, 914 by the Italians, 348 by the Germans, 250 by the Hungarians.

² Over 8,000 Soviet military personnel were interned in Switzerland (escaped PW from German and Italian camps). Their cases came within the duties of the Internment Section.

(3) Various Red Cross Societies and administrative bodies, which occasionally furnished information on PW and on men who had died.

It should further be mentioned that a certain number of Soviet prisoners in Germany were enlisted, voluntarily or under compulsion, in the German army or in special units fighting with it. Some of these men were captured by the Allies and their names then appeared on lists of German PW sent by the official bureaux of the Allied Powers to Geneva.

The Russian Section received only a very small number of enquiries concerning military personnel. Most of the requests came from persons who lived outside Russia, or in Soviet territory occupied by the enemy : very few applications came from unoccupied Russia.

The enquiries the Section was asked to make were lodged with the Finnish, Rumanian, German Red Cross Societies, and in some cases with the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR. The only response to these applications came from the Finnish and Rumanian Red Cross Societies. The German Red Cross stated it would reply direct to the inquirer, if contact could be made with the applicant.

* * *

Almost all information relating to civilian internees received by the Section concerned escaped PW interned in Switzerland. These civilian internees, like the military, were the care of the Internment Service. The Russian Section merely looked after their mail and their requests for enquiries.

Of the civilian internees outside Switzerland, the Agency received only a few hundred names, mostly from the Committee's delegations in various countries, the Red Cross Societies in detaining States and some internees themselves or their next of kin.

The Agency pursued a certain number of enquiries, most of which were sent to the Committee's delegations, and to the

Italian and German Red Cross Societies. The information gathered by these means was very scanty.

Many more enquiries were made concerning free civilians than about civilian internees or military personnel. The majority of the free civilians sought were Jews who had numerous relatives and friends resident abroad, in particular in Palestine. As most of these persons were resident in Russian territories occupied by the Axis forces, it was scarcely possible to make enquiries about them. It was only as these territories were gradually liberated that the Section was able to send messages to them. Many messages were returned with the remark : "Gone away", "Unknown", "Incomplete address". A tenth part only was returned with replies from the person concerned, from neighbours or from the Soviet (house committee) of their former dwelling.

* * *

The Section encountered two difficulties of a purely technical nature ; to overcome them it had recourse to the services of a staff with a perfect knowledge of the Russian language and script, and able to spend a considerable amount of time on certain work.

The first difficulty was the fact that names in lists or on enquiry forms were usually written by persons ignorant of the Russian language and script. The names were generally written in Latin characters and had thus undergone mutilation, as some Russian characters have no Latin equivalent. The Section's index cards were made out in Russian characters. It was therefore necessary to rewrite in Russian characters all names appearing in documents. Without indication of the system used for the transcription of the names, this task was not always an easy one¹.

The other difficulty lay in the fact that messages had to be transmitted to the USSR at a time when the western and south-western territories of the country were occupied by the

¹ Finland alone indicated the system of transcription used.

Axis forces. Each address therefore had to be checked in order to determine whether the message should be sent to the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Moscow, or to the National Red Cross Society of one of the USSR's adversaries. As the greater number of the messages had to go to villages, such research often took a very long time.

Czechoslovak Section

At the outset of hostilities the Agency had set up two separate sections within the so-called "Grouped Countries" Section : the Czech and the Slovak Sections. These two Sections existed side by side until the reconstitution of the Czechoslovak State, in May 1945, when they were amalgamated to form a National Czechoslovak Section.

It will be recalled that the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, in March 1939, by the German forces and the constitution of Slovakia as an independent State, completed the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and temporarily put an end to its existence. Bohemia and Moravia were annexed by the Reich and were constituted a "Protectorate"; the inhabitants of these areas therefore did not become German, and the men were not liable for military service¹.

In these circumstances, when hostilities broke out in September 1939, the countries of the Protectorate were not involved in the war. A few of their nationals, however, enlisted in the belligerent forces. As regards Slovakia, this country entered into the war in June 1941 against the U.S.S.R. and sent two divisions to the Eastern front. It is clear from the above why there were relatively few Czechoslovak prisoners of war.

In the course of the war a certain number of Czech volunteers in foreign armies were taken prisoner. Germany considered

¹ Former Czechoslovak nationals belonging to the German minorities resident in territories annexed by the Reich in consequence of the Munich agreement were naturally enrolled in German units. Those taken prisoner were therefore dealt with by the German Section.

Captured members of the Hungarian minority were dealt with by the Hungarian Section.

them as nationals of the country they had been serving, and transmitted their names to the Agency. The latter was able, in particular, to send the competent authorities in Great Britain information on Czech prisoners who had fought in the British forces, and who were PW in Germany. On the other hand, the U.S.S.R. sent the Agency no information on Slovak military personnel captured by the Soviet forces. The Agency set enquiries on foot in response to requests for information on men who were missing on the Eastern front, but no replies were received.

The Agency received no information on Czechoslovak combatants who fought in the Soviet forces and were captured by the Germans. It was only when the war had ended that it learned of the existence of these particular PW.

The activity of the Czechoslovak Section in behalf of civilians was even more restricted than for military personnel. The Section was indeed able to be of service to the few Czechoslovak nationals interned in certain countries, or who simply had no news of their relatives because of the interruption in postal communications. On the other hand, it could accomplish hardly anything in the search for information on tens of thousands of deportees, many of whom died in the concentration camps. Only 1,500 names of deportees in Theresienstadt (Terezin) reached the Section in 1944 on receipts for relief parcels the ICRC had despatched to this place.

American Section

The American Section was set up on December 9, 1941, when the United States became involved in the conflict. The U.S. Forces having in general initiated operations, except at the beginning of the war in the Philippines and in the Pacific Islands, the number of American prisoners was small. The American Section, therefore, never went through the periods of improvisation and of mass arrival of data, in the way experienced by certain other Sections of the Agency. It also had the benefit of past experience and was thus in a position to meet requirements at all times without much difficulty.

The Prisoners of War Information Bureau of the Office of the Provost Marshal General in Washington, and the American Red Cross, who worked in close co-operation and were remarkably well organized, served as an efficient information bureau for American next of kin and considerably lightened the Agency's task. The American Section was thus able to give the whole of its attention to the business of sending on information on PW received from Detaining States to the Official Bureau in Washington. Relatives living in America preferred, in fact, to apply direct to American organizations, as postal communications between the States and Switzerland took a long time and were uncertain during the war.

The United States Forces were in action on two fronts at the same time; the work of the American Section in respect of the Pacific theatre of war and the European will be examined separately.

WAR IN THE PACIFIC

Apart from engagements in Wake and Guam Islands and in the Philippines, when the United States lost almost all the land forces that went into action, operations in the Pacific were for the most part carried out by the Air Force and the Navy, and relatively small numbers of men were employed.

All the PW looked after by the American Section were captured during the first months of the fighting. Later, the only members of the American Forces taken prisoner were the airmen forced down during raids on Japan, or on territories occupied by the Japanese. No difficulties, therefore, arose in sending information concerning these men, since the work was spread out, as it will be seen, over the whole period of the war.

Japan was not a signatory to the 1929 Convention relative to the treatment of PW. When Japan came into the war, the ICRC at once invited the Japanese Government to make declarations which would practically have the same effect as adherence to this Convention. The Japanese Government, having received assurances of reciprocity, at once agreed to exchange information on PW and civilian internees, and a Japanese official Information Bureau was set up by Imperial Decree on December 27, 1941¹.

The Committee's Delegation in Tokyo, after many attempts, at length succeeded in securing, in April 1942, from the Japanese authorities particulars concerning American combatants and civilians captured when Wake and Guam Islands were taken. The details were at once cabled to the Agency.

As postal communications between Switzerland and the United States were uncertain and difficult, the American Section decided to cable to the Washington Official Bureau all information on prisoners, in advance of the despatch of photostat

¹ The "Huryojohokioku" or the Japanese Ministry of War Information Bureau on Prisoners of War. On the matter of Japan's agreement to apply, *mutatis mutandis*, the 1929 Geneva Convention relative to Treatment of Prisoners of War, see the chapter on the War in the Far East in Vol. I, where the subject is dealt with in detail.

copies of documents. This practice, which was one of the special features of the Section, had for similar reasons already been employed by the British Section since 1940.

In May 1942 the Japanese Official Bureau sent their first cable announcing captures. In the following months they yielded only little information, and it was not until December 1942, seven months after the end of the Philippines campaign, that the Japanese finally cabled to Geneva the first notifications of captures in these operations.

The work of the Section in 1942 in regard to the war in the Pacific was almost wholly in behalf of civilians, most of whom had been members of the American colony in the Philippines. The enquiries which came in by thousands, entailed, as a rule, application to the Japanese Red Cross for information. The results, however, of these enquiries were most unsatisfactory¹.

A large number of these civilians were, however, able to exchange messages with their relatives in the United States. The Japanese Red Cross cabled them to the Agency and the latter to the American Red Cross. This system compensated, to a certain degree, for the poor response to enquiries.

Mention should also be made of the important investigation work carried out by the Committee's Delegations in Shanghai and Hongkong concerning civilians in China.

Communications from the Japanese Official Bureau about military personnel taken prisoner during the Philippines campaign, and subsequent notifications of transfers and deaths of prisoners, came in slowly all through the war. Even at the time of the surrender, the Japanese authorities had still not communicated all the nominal lists of men captured by them, or of those who had died while in their hands. Ordinary and diplomatic mail were too slow, and these communications were therefore made by cable.

As enquiries to the Huryojohokioku on missing members of the forces proved fruitless, the American Section, after a time, abandoned that course. The only enquiries made there-

¹ See also Vol. I, chapter already mentioned.

fore to the Bureau were those for supplementary details about men whose capture had already been officially notified.

In 1944, the Japanese authorities took the initiative of arranging an exchange of cable messages between PW and their next of kin. The restrictions the Japanese authorities had previously laid on the exchange of correspondence made this move particularly welcome. The messages, which all passed through Geneva, were assembled in the United States both on departure and arrival by the American Red Cross. In the Far East, transmission of cables devolved on the Japanese official Bureau. This system came into force in January 1945. It worked satisfactorily for messages from next of kin to PW, but very few messages arrived for relatives from the Far East¹.

Thus the only service of the Japanese official Bureau was to cable information on capture, transfers and deaths of American military personnel to the Agency. Such information was often sent only after considerable delay. No lists were ever forwarded confirming data given in these cables, and no news reached the Agency concerning wounded and sick prisoners. The Japanese official Bureau also failed to send any death certificates. When a reckoning is made of the small success in seeking information from the Bureau, of the fact that the American Section was quite unable to make contact with camp spokesmen, and of the restrictions on mail imposed by the Japanese military authorities, it must be admitted that the situation was far from satisfactory.

EUROPEAN THEATRE OF OPERATIONS

Since the chief adversary of the United States in this theatre was Germany, almost all American PW captured during European operations fell into German hands. Thus, the work of the American Section in respect of the operations in Europe was necessarily closely linked with its relations with the German official Bureau².

¹ See page 61.

² Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, Wehrmachtauskunftstelle für Kriegerverluste und Kriegsgefangene, usually called "OKW".

Up to the time of the Allied landing in North Africa, on November 8, 1942, the only forces sent into action by the American Command were those of the USAF. Information relative to American airmen captured or shot down on duty was, throughout the war, granted priority transmission. The OKW, fulfilling the agreement on reciprocity, telegraphed this information, usually without delay, to Geneva, as they did in the case of British airmen. On receipt this information was translated into English and cabled by the American Section to the Official Bureau in Washington. The office in Washington was thus able to give word, almost at once, to the relatives of airmen casualties, with details of each case.

After November 8, 1942, and after the successive landings, the American forces were engaged in major operations in North Africa and in Europe. These troops suffered no serious reverses, but their increasing share in the Italian campaign, and later the part they played after the Allied landing in Normandy in 1944, led to the capture of some tens of thousands of men by the German forces.

Generally speaking, the OKW was able to fulfil its duties as Official Bureau till the end of the fighting. During the last months of the war, however, intensive bombing gradually disorganized the German administrative departments, and lists sent by the OKW often arrived too late to be entirely useful. In these circumstances, lists drawn up by camp leaders and capture cards filled in by prisoners themselves, which came direct to the Agency in a comparatively short time, were extremely valuable. When this information was found to contain new details it was cabled to the Washington Official Bureau along lines explained below.

The American Section set on foot enquiries chiefly at the request of the Washington Official Bureau. These researches which covered the missing, identification of PW or of the dead, the state of health and location of PW camps, were made, according to the particular case, by way of the German Official Bureau, camp leaders, and, less frequently, the German Red Cross. Results were on the whole satisfactory.

The Section was of service in the forwarding of a consider-

able volume of mail and messages. Thus, though the major portion of prisoner of war mail went through the ordinary postal channels, the Section, after checking addresses and sometimes after completing them with the help of the data contained in the card-index, sent over a million and a half letters and messages to camps. This large amount of mail was due to the fact that, on the strength of agreements concluded between the Agency and the American authorities, next of kin in the United States were allowed to write to PW by way of Geneva immediately on receiving capture cards, and without having to wait for further details informing them of the prisoner's exact place of detention. This arrangement meant that numbers of PW were able to get news from home in a relatively short time.

One of the chief characteristics of the work of the American Section was close and steady co-operation with camp leaders. Their help was indeed of very great service in providing information, attending to enquiries, and the transmission of messages.

* * *

The working methods of the American Section were, in general, similar to those of other National Sections. Two features should be mentioned, however, as they distinguished this Section from the others.

Whereas all the other National Sections built up their card-indexes with card entries in typescript, the American Section used Watson Machine cards, on which information was simultaneously recorded in typescript and registered by means of appropriate perforations¹.

When the American Section was opened, the British Section had already recognized the usefulness of PW lists drawn up with the help of the Hollerith machines, according to army or PW numbers. Lists made in this way brought together cards relating to the same man, even in cases where several men had

¹ See Application of Hollerith machines to the work of the Central Agency, p. 108.

the same name or where the names were distorted : without this system, the cards relating to one man would have been filed separately. It was therefore decided that the lists of American PW should be drawn up in this way, and that for the American Section, the Hollerith cards should be at once established in duplicate. One copy was filed in the card-index and the other used for establishing lists. The Hollerith cards filed in the Section's index served the same purpose as the typescript cards in the other Sections.

As explained above, the American Section cabled information received from various sources on PW and internees to the Washington Official Bureau. This information very often came through, however, in a sequence different from that of events, and frequently information on the same man was received in exactly the same form from different sources. In these circumstances, it is obvious that had the American Section cabled all data as received to Washington, the U.S. Official Bureau would have been obliged, in dealing with such a flow of notifications, to classify them itself ; further, cable charges would have been very high.

To meet these difficulties, the Section made use of a system already tried out by the British Section, and which can be summarized as follows. On arrival in the Section data were sorted into two categories, each of which was dealt with in a different way. In the first were placed all documents giving names of PW or of deceased who, apparently, were unknown to the Agency. This information was immediately cabled to Washington ; the cards were made subsequently and filed in the index. The second class included all documents providing supplementary data or notification of transfer to other camps of PW already on the Agency's files. In this case information was first entered on cards which were checked with the card-index, and the filing clerks then decided, on the basis of information already registered, if it was necessary or not to cable the information just received.

In March 1945, the peak period of the American Section, the staff numbered 45.

Japanese Section

The Japanese Section was opened in December 1941, after the entry of Japan into the war.

Until the autumn of 1944, that is, for more than two and a half years, the Japanese Section concerned itself almost exclusively with civilians, either interned or at liberty. During this whole period, the number of Japanese soldiers who fell into enemy hands was extremely small, partly because the Japanese forces constantly had the upper hand during the first months of hostilities, and partly because the forces engaged in the later fighting were relatively small. A few lists of PW came in from the official Bureaux of New Zealand, Australia and the United States. The forwarding of these lists to the Japanese authorities constituted the only work the Section did for the benefit of the Japanese PW, since no one was ever concerned to ask for news of them. It is known that to be a PW has always been considered in Japan as a disgrace reflecting on the whole family¹.

With regard to civilians, the situation was very different. The large Japanese colonies in the United States, Canada, Australia and India were, from the outset, subject to security measures such as internment, removal and assembly in particular centres. The names of all Japanese interned or evacuated were communicated to the Central Agency by the authorities of the countries who had taken these measures. The forwarding of such information to Japan was not the only task of the Section. Relatives and friends in Japan became anxious, either because

¹ See Vol. I, "Conflict in the Far East".

they had failed to receive any notice of internment, or simply because they had been without news, as a result of the breakdown of postal communications. A large number of such enquiries reached the Japanese Section, and each case was taken up with the competent authority of the country in question, or very often with the Committee's delegations. These enquiries led to no immediate results, for these countries are separated by immense distances from Switzerland, and the process of censorship added greatly to the delay in the delivery of mail. It was only after several months that replies came in ; the Section was then in a position to answer almost all the applications.

From the autumn of 1944, the work of the Japanese Section changed. Until this date, it was chiefly a tracing bureau for civilians, now it became primarily an intermediary agency for the transmission of news of PW and civilian internees. This happened at a time when the final British and American offensive was launched in the Pacific, the first incident of which was the capture of the Marianne Islands. These operations led to the taking prisoner of many Japanese soldiers by the Allies and to the internment of a great number of civilians living in the captured territories.

Until the end of the war and for some time afterwards the main task of the Section was to forward to the Japanese authorities the information it received from the official Bureaux in the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, and from the Committee's delegation in India, on the subject of PW and internees.

* * *

One of the distinguishing features of the work of the Japanese Section was the extensive use it made of the telegraph in transmitting information to Japan : this was the only rapid method of communicating with this country. As a rule, all information received by wire from the official Bureaux of captor States was sent to Japan by the same means.

The work of the Section in keeping the card-index up to date encountered great difficulties in the Japanese language.

There could, indeed, be no question of Western people using Japanese characters. In writing this language, a system of phonetic transcription is used which renders as accurately as possible the sounds of the Japanese language, and which allows the writing of Japanese in Latin characters. The principal source of difficulty for the Section was the current use of two systems of transliteration, which are marked by notable differences. One of these methods, devised at the end of the nineteenth century, was employed by the Japanese official Bureau ; the other, known as the Hepburn system, was used by the official Bureaux of the captor States and by civilian internees in their enquiries. The Japanese Section was forced to introduce special rules of filing which took both systems into account, and which allowed cards of application and information to be filed next to each other.

Finally, mention should be made of the fact, which had always to be borne in mind in the Section, that a person might be known and referred to under several different names. The confusion of family name and first name, and the frequent inaccuracy, no less frequent, of certain other details of identification, such as age, made classification still more difficult.

Hungarian Section

The Hungarian Section was set up as a result of the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union, in June 1941. Hungary went into the war as an ally of the Reich on June 27. During the greater part of the war, the Hungarian Section had comparatively little work to do ; but after the spring of 1944, and even more during the period which immediately followed the end of the war, events in Hungary led to a considerable increase in the activities of the Section.

No Hungarian unit saw service on the Western front. Only a few thousand Hungarian nationals belonging to the German racial group fought in the ranks of the Wehrmacht, mainly as SS troops. The Hungarian Section had to deal with the notifications of capture of these men and applications from their relatives, most of whom had remained in Hungary.

In the East, on the other hand, the Hungarian armed forces took an active part in operations. At first, their role was mainly confined to the occupation of territory conquered by the Wehrmacht. Thus, up to the winter of 1942-1943, they only suffered very small losses. Things changed, however, at the time of the Russian break-through at Voronezh in January 1943, during which the Hungarian army serving in the Russian campaign lost nearly half its strength, either killed or as prisoners : it is estimated that at that time 80,000 men fell into the hands of the Soviet forces.

Failing any information as to these PW, since the Central Agency received no official information from the Soviet Union, the Hungarian Section had to confine itself to registering the

numerous applications for enquiries and for news, to which these events gave rise.

Nevertheless, a certain number of Hungarian PW in the Soviet Union were able to communicate with their relatives in Hungary, since the men in certain of the camps had been provided with special message-cards. These messages sometimes passed through the Central Agency, and the Hungarian Section had in that case to forward them. The Hungarian Red Cross, for its part, forwarded to the Agency information received from the USSR through this exchange of messages, which enabled the Section to give news to many families living abroad, especially in the United States.

The Hungarian Section, during this first period of its activities, had to deal with some hundreds of civilian internees, including a good many seamen, who were scattered over a number of countries.

In March 1944, when the situation on the Eastern front became more and more threatening, Germany went ahead with the military occupation of Hungary, which was followed on October 15 of the same year, by the setting up of the "Arrow-head Cross" (*Croix fléchées*) regime. These events inaugurated a period of political persecution, during which more than 15,000 political prisoners and several hundred thousand Jews were deported.

Applications for enquiries coming from Hungary and from various other countries, particularly from the United States, began to pour in. The Hungarian Section saw its activities greatly increasing, the more so since application cards concerning men missing on the Eastern front were at the same time reaching it from the Hungarian Red Cross in great numbers. The Section, which had hitherto occupied only one or two people, rose gradually a strength of about ten assistants. Unfortunately the great amount of work done by the Section at this time was to a large extent unproductive, for the Agency received no information from the Soviet Union concerning the prisoners, nor from Germany in respect of the deportees ; only chance information sometimes enabled it to reply to applicants.

The Section did nevertheless, at this time have an oppor-

tunity of acting usefully for the Jews who were interned in Switzerland, especially with regard to the forwarding of mail to Hungary, Palestine and the United States, and the giving of information to relations in those countries.

Towards the end of the war, there was a fresh upheaval in Hungary, and the Section went through a period of intense activity. The retreat of the German army was followed by the occupation of the country by the Soviet forces. The greater part of the Hungarian army was driven into Germany, and so were the Hungarians of school age who had been enrolled in semi-military units. In all, there were about half a million men.

The troops of the regular army fell into the hands of British, French and United States forces, who, during the next few months, sent capture-cards in great numbers to the Agency, and also many official lists and death certificates ; this at last gave the Hungarian Section an opportunity to do practical work, based on accurate information and the " tallies " of enquiries and replies. At the same time, a large number of letters and cards sent by these men to their relatives reached the Section.

Serious difficulties, however, arose in respect of the forwarding of all these data to the relatives. They were of the same kind as those met with at this time as regards communicating to Germany information concerning the PW and the dead of the German armed forces. Postal communications with Hungary were still cut off, and the Hungarian population, like the German, had been much scattered by recent events. Thus, nearly 500,000 Hungarian civilians of all kinds, driven by events, had taken refuge in Austria and Bavaria.

Altogether, more than one-tenth of the population of Hungary had been thus displaced. Applications therefore poured into the Agency. It was at this post-war period that the Hungarian Section was most active ; its personnel numbered fifteen at the beginning of 1946.

To meet as far as possible the difficulties of forwarding information to Hungary, and to reach the addressees more speedily, the Section systematically resorted to the broadcasting of lists of names at this time. In the case of Transylvanians, names were read first in Hungarian and then in Rumanian.

During the year 1946, the repatriation of Hungarian PW in the hands of the Western Powers, following on that of the Austrians, led to a gradual diminishing in the work of the Hungarian Section. This was accentuated by the reopening of the postal traffic and the return to Hungary of certain groups of refugees and evacuees. Some of those who remained in Austria and in Germany were referred to other organizations. Thus, in the second part of 1946, the activities of the Hungarian Section were much reduced, and only a small correspondence section was henceforth required.

* * *

The filing of cards in the Hungarian index was made especially arduous by reason of the phonetic transliteration of Hungarian names. Furthermore, owing to the continual changes in the frontiers of Hungary, it was often difficult to decide which cases should be allotted to the Section. Further obstacles lay in the frequent transliteration of the names of applicants and of persons sought for into German, Rumanian, Serbian, Slovak, Ruthenian, etc.

The total correspondence received by the Hungarian Section up to June 30, 1947, amounted to more than 50,000 letters, to which several hundred telegrams should be added. It sent out more than 60,000 messages. Finally, there were nearly 350,000 cards in its card-index at that date.

Rumanian Section

The Rumanian Section was set up in June 1941, as a result of the entry of Rumania into the war on the side of Germany against the Soviet Union.

The history of Rumania during the second World War falls into two quite distinct periods, separated by the Russo-Rumanian armistice of August 24, 1944. During the first period Rumania fought against the Soviet Union, and during the second it fought against Germany. These two phases each in their turn influenced the activities of the Section.

The campaign in Russia involved heavy losses for the Rumanian army, both in killed and in prisoners. Since the USSR had not supplied any information concerning these men, the Rumanian Section had to confine itself to classifying the great number of applications received from Rumania ; more than 40,000 of these were received up to 1944, most of them coming from the Rumanian Red Cross. Attempts were made to obtain information from the USSR by means of enquiries, but they were unsuccessful.

Although the Agency received no official information, many Rumanian PW in the USSR were able to send message-cards giving news to their relatives. The Rumanian Section received from the Rumanian Red Cross about 5,000 names of PW who had sent out news in this way, which made it possible to reply to applicants living outside Rumania.

In December 1941, a state of war was declared between Rumania, Great Britain, and the United States ; the Rumanian Section had henceforth to forward lists and messages, and to set on foot enquiries with regard to the civilians who were interned by degrees in the countries of the British Common-

wealth and America. Among these, mention should be made of the members of crews of oil tankers which were stopped and examined by the British Navy ; these men were interned in India.

At the request of relatives living abroad, the Rumanian Section also set on foot many enquiries in Rumania itself, in respect of Rumanian civilians, and it was often possible to supply definite information to the applicants, especially to those in North America.

The armistice of August 24, 1944 led to the change in alliance and to the entry of Rumania into the war on the side of the Allies.

Among the many Rumanian divisions who, after that time, fought on the side of the Allies, there were two which were formed of ex-prisoners in U.S.S.R. By reason of the chaotic situation in Germany at that time, the Agency did not receive much information with regard to Rumanian PW captured by the German forces. Certain camp leaders took the initiative themselves in preparing lists of their fellow-countrymen in the camps and managed to send them to Geneva. In the same way, it was possible to send a certain number of capture cards to the Agency.

The Section also received capture cards and lists in respect of about 2,000 Rumanian PW who were taken in Germany in somewhat exceptional circumstances. These were Rumanian military personnel assigned to that country by the Government for military training or co-ordination. Being cut off on German territory by the armistice of August 24, these men were taken prisoner. The Section telegraphed all their names to the Rumanian Red Cross.

When the Rumanian internees in the concentration camps were released by the Allied forces, the Section broadcast several thousand names of the survivors by wireless ; the names of the Transylvanians were read out in Rumanian and Hungarian. The broadcasting of lists of names was the only means of giving speedy information to next of kin, many of whom were themselves displaced. After broadcasting, the lists were forwarded to the Rumanian Red Cross.

The Section had to deal with a special category of Rumanian subjects, that of the "Volksdeutsche" or members of the German racial minority in Rumania, who were natives of Transylvania or of the Banat, and who had been enrolled in the German army. Several thousands of them were captured by the British, French and United States forces, and the Agency received capture-cards, lists and identity cards concerning them. Most of them were shown in these documents, or described themselves as Rumanians; therefore the Section had to deal with them, working in close contact with the German Section. This information was communicated to the Rumanian Red Cross, to be passed on to the families concerned.

A certain proportion of members of the German racial minority had retired into Germany and Austria with the German troops. At the end of the war, several thousands of these "Volksdeutsche" reported themselves to the Agency as "dispersed Rumanian civilians", and asked for news of their relations. In certain cases, the Rumanian Section was able to put members of families thus scattered in touch with each other.

Finally, it should be said that the staff of the Rumanian Section was never more than three, and that on June 30, 1947 it had nearly 120,000 cards in its index.

Bulgarian Section

On February 19, 1941, Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact and allowed German troops to enter her territory. This act led her to break off diplomatic relations with Belgium, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Poland, and brought her into the war.

The campaigns in Yugoslavia and Greece were the principal military events in which the Bulgarian Army took part. But the fighting was done mainly by the German Army, and the Bulgarian troops, although they had occupied part of Serbia, Macedonia and Eastern Thrace, did not make contact with the Yugoslav and Greek forces.

In these circumstances there were no Bulgarian PW at this stage, so that there was no question of forming a Bulgarian Section at the Central Agency.

It was not until January 1942, that the ICRC notified the Bulgarian Government that the services of the Agency were at its disposal, in accordance with the PW Convention of 1929. In point of fact, although no formal state of war existed between Bulgaria and the Soviet Union, a large number of Bulgarians fought in the ranks of the German Army on the Eastern Front, and the Agency had already received some applications concerning missing men. The attempts made by the Section to get information concerning Bulgarian soldiers missing on the Eastern Front were however unsuccessful.

The breaking off of diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Great Britain brought about the internment of a number of Bulgarians, especially in Palestine, Egypt and India. The Section forwarded any information received concerning them

to the Bulgarian Red Cross. It also set enquiries on foot with the British authorities.

At the end of 1944, Bulgaria declared war on Germany. During the engagements which followed, several hundred Bulgarians were taken prisoner. Although the German official Bureau did not communicate any information regarding these men to the Central Agency, the camp leaders forwarded nominal rolls, which the Agency passed on to the Bulgarian Red Cross.

The state of war between Bulgaria and Germany brought about the separation of Bulgarian students in Germany and members of the small agricultural settlements in Germany and Yugoslavia from their relatives and friends in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Section acted as intermediary amongst these people in the exchange of news. It continued to carry out this task after the war, as postal communications between Bulgaria and Germany were not restored again until a long time after.

Finnish Section

When in November 1939, war broke out between Finland and the USSR, the ICRC informed the Finnish Government that, although Finland had not ratified the 1929 PW Convention, the Committee was prepared to receive and transmit information concerning the wounded and prisoners. At the same time, the ICRC made all the necessary preparation for a Finnish Section at the Central Agency. The Finnish Government informed the ICRC that it had instructed the Finnish Red Cross to constitute an official Information Bureau, as required in Art. 77 of the Convention.

The Soviet Government, however, supplied no information on Finnish prisoners, and the Agency was unable to be of any service to the Finnish PW captured in this first campaign.

In June 1941, when the German forces invaded Russia, Finland once more took up arms against that country. At the start of this second Russo-Finnish war, the ICRC reminded both Governments of the terms of the 1929 Geneva Convention proper and of the Fourth Hague Convention of 1907 on the laws and customs of war on land, both Conventions having been ratified by Finland and Russia. Both agreed to apply the treaty stipulations of these Conventions, subject to reciprocity. They further undertook to allow PW to fill in capture cards and to exchange nominal lists of PW. Unfortunately, no lists ever arrived from Russia and when this particular conflict ended in 1944, the Section had been unable to do anything in behalf of Finnish PW.

Certain tasks were nevertheless fulfilled by the Finnish Section. In December 1941, Great Britain and the Dominions

declared they were in a state of war with Finland. Many Finnish vessels then at sea or in harbour were seized by the British Navy. The crews were interned and considered as civilian internees by the Powers who held them. At the beginning of 1942 information on these seamen began to reach the Agency, which the Section forwarded to the Finnish Red Cross.

Further, fairly large Finnish colonies exist in the British Commonwealth, the United States and South America. These people, cut off from their home country and gravely concerned about the fate of their relatives and friends, applied to the Agency. The Finnish Section started enquiries with the Finnish Red Cross which was, in most cases, able to reply in due course.

Baltic Section

In June 1940, the territories of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were once more brought within the U.S.S.R. In the following year, after the German advance towards the East, these three States were in turn occupied by the German armed forces. Finally, in December 1943, the Soviet forces took possession of them yet again.

As a consequence of these events, the citizens of these three countries were recruited into either Soviet or German forces, and numbers of people were evacuated or deported.

It was not until the end of 1942, however, that the Central Agency had to deal with cases relating to the citizens of these three States. At this time, nationals of the Baltic States domiciled in Canada, South Africa and the United States, were anxious about the fate of their relatives still living in those States, and sent a number of applications to the Agency. In January 1943, therefore, the Section for Baltic Countries was set up in order to deal with the cases of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. To the above applications others were added from citizens living in the Soviet Union whose countries of origin were the Baltic States. These requests came by way of the Committee's delegation in Teheran. Most of these applications were the subject of enquiries made to the German Red Cross. With the exception of enquiries concerning Jews, for which no replies were received, the results on the whole were satisfactory; replies, however, only came in after long delay.

As there was no possibility of carrying out enquiries in the U.S.S.R., the Section for Baltic Countries, in order to reply to applications, attempted to obtain information regarding citizens

of the Baltic States in that country by sending messages to them direct. Only eighty of these were returned to the Agency with replies, after an interval of more than two years.

In February 1945, there was an increase in the number of enquiries received from South Africa and the United States. Unfortunately, all communications with the Baltic States had been broken off at this time.

Sundry Nationalities

The Agency was called upon to extend its work to include certain combatants and civilians who were nationals of non-belligerent countries. This applied in particular to nationals of Abyssinia, Afghanistan, Andorra, Iran, Iraq, Liberia, Switzerland and Turkey, as well as to non-Jewish stateless, in possession or not of a Nansen passport. Nationals of a neutral country, or stateless persons who had been resident for many years in a country now suddenly involved in the war, sometimes enlisted in the armed forces of that country. Nationals of neutral states also left their own country to enlist in the forces of one or the other group of belligerents.

In the event of these volunteers being taken prisoner, the Detaining Power usually considered them as nationals of the State they had served, and sent information concerning them to the Agency.

A few belligerent States took measures to confine certain nationals of neutral countries resident in their territories: some of these were interned, others detained. These States sent information on these persons to the Agency. No official information, however, reached the Agency, as is well known, concerning deportees in concentration camps.

The Agency's work consisted in transmitting to the relatives of these prisoners and civilian internees any information received about them. These communications usually went through the municipal authorities of the places of residence of relatives, or through the intermediary of the clergy. Information relative to prisoners was also sent to the official Bureau of the Power they had served.

The Agency was often asked to undertake search, not only for volunteers and for civilian internees, but also for civilians of whom the enquirer had lost all trace, following on the break-down of postal communications.

The most frequent cases of this kind were those of Swiss nationals and of stateless persons.

Austrian Section

Since the annexation of Austria by Germany in 1938 and up to the end of the war, nationals of the former Austria had in fact German nationality. During the war they did not constitute special units in the Wehrmacht, but were scattered throughout the army as a whole, in such a way that they took their share in all that befell nationals of the Reich. Their capture, or their decease, were announced to the Central Agency by the Allied official Bureaux as the capture or decease of German military personnel. The Agency, whose national Sections, as we know, were based on the nationality of the prisoners, defined by the frontiers as they existed on September 1, 1939, could only take into account the *de facto* situation, in dealing with Austrian nationals within the framework of the German Section, without making any distinction.

The reconstitution of a national Austrian Government as a result of the collapse of the Third Reich, led the ICRC, in the month of May 1945, to consider the setting up of a Section in the Central Agency, which would look after Austrian nationals and thus help them, to some degree, to escape the disastrous consequences of the dissolution of any official centralizing body, such as the O.K.W. and the German Red Cross, and of all the German machinery for the giving out of information supplied by Geneva.

In order to set up an Austrian Section in Geneva, it was first necessary that the detaining States should agree that communications concerning PW who declared themselves to be Austrians and were recognized as such, should thenceforth be made separately from those concerning Germans, and that

capture-cards, lists, identity cards and death certificates should specify clearly the Austrian nationality. The ICRC took the initiative in making representations for this purpose ; in June 1945 it applied to the Allied Powers seeking their agreement. Although the various detaining States did not all meet this request at the same time, or in an equally satisfactory manner, the Agency was soon receiving an increasing number of data which were clearly marked as referring to Austrians.

On July 2, 1945, an Austrian Service was set up within the German Section. On October 1, it became an independant Section, the last to be established in the Central Agency.

In order to allocate information received and applications for enquiries to the new Section, the Agency decided to define members of the forces who should be regarded as Austrians in the following manner.

(1) All those referred to as such by the detaining Power in the documents which it forwarded to Geneva.

(2) All those who declared themselves to be Austrians on their capture-cards.

(3) All those whose relatives described them as Austrians in their applications.

(4) Failing an explicit definition of the nationality on the documents, all those whose place of birth and address of parents (last domicile) were both in Austria, taking as a basis the frontiers of that country as they existed in 1938, before the Anschluss.

When the Austrian Service (which later became the Austrian Section) was set up, information and applications poured in, and the card-index speedily increased. It was at this time that the Allied official Bureaux sent to Geneva a vast amount of data on the capture and the death of members of the Wehrmacht during the last period of the war. A considerable proportion of this information—it may be estimated at 10 per cent—concerned Austrians.

The staff working in the new Section were obliged, as a matter of routine, to consult the card-index of the German Section

for all the information and requests received, since that index contained a considerable amount of data concerning Austrians, which had reached the Agency before the setting up of an independent Section.

The Austrian Section was thus very quickly faced by an onerous task ; its staff had to be therefore considerably increased : in the summer of 1946, it reached the figure of about 30 people. The Section was also greatly assisted by the Auxiliary Sections in Switzerland ; in the end, two working teams were set up by the Agency among the Austrian military personnel interned in Switzerland.

During the first months of its existence, the Austrian Section experienced the same kind of difficulties as the German Section, by reason of the dissolution of the O.K.W. and the German Red Cross, which during the war had taken over all the work of distributing the information supplied by the Central Agency. As in Germany, the Committee's delegations in Austria were called on to meet this deficiency as far as possible, until qualified national bodies were set up. It was for this reason that, until the end of the year 1945, the Austrian Section sent all the data it received to the delegation in Vienna, which was responsible for forwarding them to the provincial branches of the Austrian Red Cross or to the relatives. The delegations on their part assembled countless applications from relatives and sent them to Geneva.

As soon as the Austrian Red Cross was reconstituted, that organization took over the task carried out in other countries by the official Information Bureaux, since circumstances did not allow of the setting up of such an office in Austria. At first, the Austrian Red Cross met with great difficulties in its work, as it was still inadequately equipped and was divided into several regional sections which were not in touch with each other, by reason of the division of the country into zones of occupation.

In February 1946, the Austrian Red Cross research services were amalgamated, and it was decided to set up a central card-index at Salzburg. From that time onwards, the Austrian Section sent all the information it received to this index centre,

and was thus able to do without the intermediary of the Committee's delegation in Austria.

These measures, however, could only represent a first stage towards the complete co-ordination of research in respect on Austrian military personnel and civilians. In fact, investigations with regard to the Eastern Front were, for practical reasons, centralized at Vienna and Graz, and not at Salzburg¹. It was now a case of organizing co-ordination between the three research centres. This aim was achieved during a national conference of the heads of all the *Suchstellen* in Austria, which was convened by the Austrian Red Cross at the suggestion of the ICRC. It was held at Salzburg at the end of October 1946, under the chairmanship of a representative of the Central Agency.

From that time, the Agency was increasingly able to transfer its duties in behalf of the Austrians to the national organizations, and as a result of that fact, the time approached for the Austrian Section to be wound up. This winding up was further hastened by the repatriation of the Austrian PW in the hands of the Western Powers².

As from May 1, 1947, the Section maintained only a small correspondence service, which was mainly occupied in seeking evidence as to deaths.

Up to June 30, 1947 the mail received by the Australian Section amounted to 377,542 letters, 280,373 messages to be forwarded and 312 telegrams. Furthermore, up to that date, this Section had started 6,026 enquiries. Finally, at the same date, there were 480,031 cards in its card-index.

¹ The *Suchstelle* in Vienna dealt with enquiries concerning the Eastern front in the strict sense of the term, and that at Graz with those concerning PW camps in Yugoslavia.

² It should be remembered that the repatriation of Austrian prisoners came after that of the Italians, but before that of the Hungarian and German prisoners.

Medical Personnel

The Medical Personnel Section of the Central Agency, or Medical Section, dealt with individual cases of members of the medical personnel and those of similar status. The Section was formed owing to the fact that this personnel, called "Protected Personnel", enjoyed a distinct status, laid down by the 1929 Geneva Convention for the relief of the wounded and sick in armies in the field¹.

The principal duties of the Medical Section were the following :

- (1) Enquiries and steps relating to individual members of Protected Personnel.
- (2) Enquiries and steps relating to the state of health of PW, and the repatriation of the sick and wounded.

(1) Protected Personnel²

The Medical Section was divided into Services which corresponded to the various National Sections of the Central Agency. In line with these, the Medical Section had adopted the criterion of nationality to classify cases relating to Protected Personnel and the sick and wounded in captivity. Each sub-section worked in close co-operation with the corresponding National Section.

¹ For all general questions concerning Protected Personnel, see Vol. I, Part II, chap. C.

² As defined by Arts. 9, 10 and 11 of the 1929 Geneva Convention for relief of the wounded and sick.

On the whole, the enquiries and negotiations conducted by the Medical Section in behalf of Protected Personnel covered the same ground as the National Sections, i. e. researches, the transmission of information and messages, etc.

In addition to this work the Medical Section was concerned with the recognition of Protected Personnel who had been captured and dealt with the applications for their repatriation ; this was the main field of its activities.

Enquiries.

During the summer of 1940, the Medical Section set on foot a great number of enquiries for medical personnel who were missing and presumed to be retained in Germany. In particular cases and for medical officers especially, the method was to send a letter of enquiry to the German Red Cross. The results were in general very satisfactory. When research was made on whole units, and the application was accompanied by a list of the missing personnel (at that period chiefly relating to nurses), a special type of enquiry was opened : these enquiries were addressed at the same time to the German and the French Red Cross. The results obtained were excellent, when it was a question of missing persons belonging to the same unit.

The same type of enquiry was resumed in 1941 and developed according to the principles applied by the National Sections for the regimental enquiries¹. The Medical Section then made enquiries amongst the medical personnel detained in the camps, and half the replies received by this means were positive.

The Section continued its enquiries during the succeeding years. Special mention should be made of the growth of the Italian Service from 1941 onwards. Italian PW in British hands were frequently moved, and the camp lists often reached the Agency after great delay. Nevertheless, the Service was able to register the fact, that several thousand Italian medical personnel were repatriated fairly speedily by means of convoys from Egypt and India.

¹ See p. 49.

The German Service began to grow mainly from 1943 onwards. The first lists arrived from North Africa. Photostats of all lists containing German medical personnel received in Geneva were sent in duplicate to Berlin, one copy for the OKW (which had the responsibility of forwarding information to relatives), and one for the German Red Cross.

Certificates of Identity.

As we have seen, the most important duty of the Medical Section was to keep vigilance over the application of the Geneva Convention to Protected Personnel.

Article 21 of the Geneva Convention lays down that Protected Personnel shall be provided with an identity document to certify their status, which they shall in no case be deprived of : in case of loss they have the right to obtain a duplicate. In point of fact, many of the medical personnel recently captured were not in possession of this vital document — some had never received such a paper, some had lost it ; in other cases it had been destroyed in the course of events, or by application of official orders ; finally, in some instances the document had been taken away from the PW at the time of his capture, in violation of treaty stipulations.

French Medical Personnel. — From the autumn of 1940, thousands of applications for certificates of identity for French personnel began to reach the Medical Section. This question was taken up with the competent authorities concerned, that is, with former recruiting centres which had meanwhile become demobilization depots. The applications were forwarded to these offices and in return the Medical Section received certificates of identity proving that the PW concerned were recognized to be medical personnel. These certificates, which consisted of a single sheet of paper stamped by the demobilization depot, were seldom accepted by the German authorities, on the grounds that they could easily be forged. In spite of these difficulties, a considerable number of medical personnel were given recognition and later on repatriated.

The Medical Section also received numerous requests for repatriation from PW's next of kin. Representations were made by the ICRC to the German authorities, who replied however, that in accordance with an agreement made with the French Government, only members of medical personnel who were not employed in camp infirmaries or military hospitals would be recognized as eligible for repatriation. All the applications, therefore, had to be refused.

The agreement for the retention of medical personnel in German camps was moreover confirmed by the French Government. The applications for medical identity cards and repatriation had to be henceforth addressed to the Army Medical Service in Paris, which undertook the necessary steps.

British Medical Personnel. — In 1941 the same problem arose for British medical personnel in German hands. The Medical Section got in touch with the British Government, and sent it the lists of duplicate certificates required. These papers were transmitted through the Protecting Power.

The Dominions applied to the Medical Section for the transmission of duplicates to applicants in Germany, but the Detaining Power refused to recognize these documents, on the grounds that they bore dates later than that of capture of the applicant (duplicates of course bore the date of issue). In spite of all representations made in Berlin, these difficulties continued until the end of hostilities.

No repatriation of British protected personnel took place until October 1945. During the first exchange of war disabled and sick, a few hundred medical personnel were able to leave with these convoys.

Belgian Medical Personnel. — The work of the Belgian Service in sending on medical certificates was greatly simplified by the fact that the Belgian Red Cross assumed the task of obtaining recognition by the occupying Power of Belgian protected personnel. All applications received at Geneva were transmitted to Brussels in the form of lists, after being registered in the index.

Italian Medical Personnel. — Until the Italian capitulation in September 1943, applications for duplicate certificates were forwarded to the Italian Red Cross in Rome, which assumed the task of seeing that these documents reached the applicants through the Protecting Power. After the armistice of 1943, there was no longer any possibility of obtaining identity certificates for medical personnel in captivity, and there was therefore no means of giving any help on this question. Italian members of the forces held by the German army were not considered as PW by the German Government, but as military internees. The German authorities therefore refused Italian medical personnel the protection of the Geneva Convention, on the grounds that the armed forces to which they belonged had not been captured in the course of military operations.

German Medical Personnel. — The Medical Section did not have to deal with identity certificates for German protected personnel until the end of hostilities. The German Red Cross forwarded duplicates direct through the Protecting Power. A few single applications were received at Geneva, which the German Service forwarded to the German Red Cross.

From the close of hostilities, and owing to the absence of a Protecting Power, the German Service received a great number of applications for identity certificates from German medical personnel retained in France, Great Britain, the United States or in the zones in Germany occupied by the three Powers.

The Medical Section was therefore faced with a fresh problem, as the applicants' country of origin no longer had any government and the National Red Cross had been dissolved. In addition, the records of the medical personnel, in Berlin, had been destroyed during the bombing. Applications continued to accumulate in the Medical Section, without it being possible to satisfy the applicants.

Relief of Medical Officers.

In 1943, an agreement was concluded between France and Germany to organize the relief of medical officers on duty in

captivity. The German Government said they were unable to supply a list of French medical officers in PW camps who fulfilled the conditions required for their replacement by colleagues sent from France. The delegates of the ICRC in Berlin undertook to collect this information in course of their visits to camps, and a great number of lists were thus forwarded to Geneva; these had usually been drawn up by the camp leader or the Senior Medical Officer. The lists were assembled, copied and forwarded to the French authorities, who made use of them to organize the planning of the replacements.

Affiliated Societies.

The Medical Section had to examine applications from members of societies affiliated to the National Red Cross Societies, such as the Friends' Ambulance Units, Knights of Malta, and others, who wished to be recognized as members of protected personnel. Since the members of these societies had no recognized certificates of identity, the Medical Section was unable to supply proof these men were attached to a Medical Service, and their efforts in this direction were only successful in a few cases.

(2). Medical enquiries and Repatriation of sick and wounded.

During the summer of 1940 a new task began for the Medical Section which was to extend considerably at a later date.

The National Sections, and the French and Belgian in particular, began to receive applications for the repatriation of sick or seriously wounded PW. Since the armistice convention signed between France and Germany contained stipulations relating to PW, the ICRC was no longer in a position to see that the Geneva Convention was applied as a whole, and the sick and wounded could not apply to the Mixed Medical Commissions. The National Sections passed on these applications to the Medical Section which, having a doctor in charge, was especially qualified to deal with them.

The Medical Section did not receive the lists of the sick and wounded for which Art. 4 of the Geneva Convention provides. The German authorities declared it to be an impossible task to supply such lists, because of the great number of PW taken during the Battle of France. Nevertheless, they gave the Medical Section the opportunity of corresponding direct with the German camp medical officers in order to obtain news individually of patients in infirmaries and military hospitals. Families in France and Belgium, having relatives who were PW in Germany, applied to the ICRC to have them repatriated. The Medical Section based its enquiries to camp medical officers on the Model Draft Agreement for direct repatriation or accommodation in a neutral country of PW for reasons of health, annexed to the 1929 Convention. They eventually applied for the immediate repatriation of sick PW, if these men fulfilled the conditions laid down in the Model Draft Agreement.

The Medical Enquiry Service remained in close contact with the National Sections for the opening of enquiries concerning sick or wounded PW. The index-cards concerning these men were filed in the National Sections, who handed the file to the Medical Section after it had been checked. The Registry also forwarded correspondence from next of kin of sick PW, or from camp leaders, direct to the Medical Section, which checked the material with the National Sections before opening a medical enquiry. Such enquiries were usually based on a request from the PW himself, his relatives, or the camp leader.

To enable an enquiry to be opened with the camp medical officer the following facts had to be known :

- (1) The exact address of the PW.
- (2) The illness from which he was suffering when the application was made.
- (3) If he was undergoing treatment or in hospital.
- (4) Address of his next of kin.

When full information was available, the Medical Enquiries Service, after making out duplicate cards, wrote to the camp Senior Medical Officer. This enquiry was always signed by the

medical head of the Section—an essential precaution, since the passing on of diagnosis details was sometimes confidential.

Replies generally took from four to six weeks to reach the Medical Section, and were forwarded to the applicants, after being submitted to the head of the Section. If the diagnosis revealed an illness justifying an application for repatriation under the terms of the Model Agreement, this application was attached to the acknowledgement sent to the camp medical officer.

All correspondence concerning each case dealt with was registered on the card filed in the Medical Section. Each PW had his personal dossier. No diagnosis was given on the cards of the National Section.

The Medical Section also received lists regularly from some Detaining Powers of PW in their hands who were patients in hospital. These lists, besides enabling the Section to keep the relatives of those concerned informed of the patients' state of health, also allowed statistics of diseases and causes of deaths to be kept up to date. These statistics gave an indication of the state of health in the camps, and were also a useful aid to the Pharmaceutical Section in allocating consignments of medicaments and medical supplies amongst the various camps.

Mixed Medical Commissions.

British and United States PW in Germany, as well as PW in Allied hands, could present themselves before the Mixed Medical Commissions which visited the camps at regular intervals. Various methods were used by the Medical Section in requesting the Detaining Power to present sick PW to these Commissions. These requests were based on an application from any of the following :

- (1) Sick or wounded PW.
- (2) PW medical officer treating the case.
- (3) Camp leader.
- (4) PW's next of kin.
- (5) National Red Cross.
- (6) Power of origin.

- (7) Requests were also based on results of medical enquiries carried out by the Medical Section.

Lists of the sick were drawn up regularly ; one copy was sent to the head of the Medical Commission, one to the Government of the Detaining Power, and one to the delegation of the ICRC in the country were the Commission was due to carry on its work, in order that a delegate could verify if the man had really been examined.

The Medical Section was however, despite numerous representations made by the ICRC, never able to verify officially that the decisions taken by the Medical Commissions were put into effect. Very often men were kept in camps, when, as they claimed, they had been passed for repatriation. The ICRC had occasion to establish that their claims were sometimes justified ; in that event, it took action with the Detaining Power.

Delegates' Reports.

The Medical Section was especially concerned with conditions of health and hygiene in the camps. Data taken from the delegates' reports were recorded on cards : the information gathered in the course of the many camp visits formed a basis for intervening ultimately with the Detaining Powers, when the conditions of hygiene in camp premises did not conform to the conditions stipulated in the 1929 Convention. In the case of epidemics, it was possible to pursue collective enquiries.

Epidemics.

In the winter of 1943, the delegation in Berlin reported that cases of exanthematic typhus had occurred in PW camps, and that it seemed a matter of urgency to vaccinate all medical personnel working in military hospitals. An extensive enquiry was opened with all German camp medical officers. The forms sent to them were very accurately filled in and gave precise details on the number of medical personnel and of those carrying out disinfection and delousing, at the same time recording their nationality. Finally they reported on the number of men already vaccinated and on the quantity of vaccines required.

(3) *Artificial Limbs*

The Artificial Limbs Service, attached to the Medical Section, was set up in order to provide medical aid for PW who, although amputees, were still detained in captivity. The Service also supplied dental material ; its activity is described in Volume III.

* * *

A few figures of significance will serve to close this summary of activities of the Medical Section from September 1939 to June 1947 :

Enquiries undertaken concerning Medical Personnel.	63,000
Applications for duplicates of identity certificates dealt with by the Section	22,000
Messages transmitted for Medical Personnel	49,000
Medical enquiries undertaken	24,000
Cases dealt with.	200,188

CID (Sundry Civilian Internees Section)

The CID (*Civils internés divers*) Section was set up in 1940 to assemble all searches for persons who had been interned by police regulations. These people, unlike the ordinary civilian internees, did not benefit by treaty protection and further, had no Protecting Power. They were refugees of various origin, mostly Jewish fugitives, but they also included men who had survived from the International Brigades which had fought in Spain, veterans from labour service units, and others. These cases could not be allocated to the National Sections, as it was impossible at the time to determine with any certainty the nationality of each person. To deal with them, a separate Section had to be set up.

From April 1942, the CID Section took over all cases of stateless persons, with the exception of those in possession of Nansen passports. The enquiries included refugees, in most cases of German or Czech origin, scattered throughout the world. In the autumn of 1942, the Section was given the enquiries on Jews on German origin, or belonging to countries under German domination, who had been deported to Eastern regions. From that time the CID Section became more extensive.

During 1943, it was decided to hand over all cases of persons of a definite nationality to the National Sections, and to retain in the CID Section only those concerning German and Austrian Jews, and stateless persons.

In these circumstances, the data on which the Section worked were inevitably very vague. Nothing was known about the destination of the convoys in which the persons under enquiry had been included. Equally, there was no indication of the date

of their arrest, and there were no responsible organizations from which to seek information. The Section had, therefore, to make enquiries from various organizations which might possibly in time be able to supply information. These were the National Red Cross Societies, the International Migration Service, municipal authorities, relief societies or charitable institutions, various religious bodies and private persons. Enquiry forms were also sent to all the camps known to the ICRC in the hope of reaching some of the persons under enquiry.

The CID Section also dealt with the transmission of messages to or from Jewish internees. Thousands of messages were sent out, but the replies received were few.

On the whole, the results achieved by the CID Section were, by force of circumstances, very disappointing. Almost the whole of its work was concerned with Jews, and it is common knowledge that neither Germany, nor countries under German control would give any information on these people.

At the peak of its activity in 1944, the CID Section had a staff of 15 persons.

IMPA

The IMPA Section (Immigration into Palestine) was set up on December 1, 1943, to assemble individual cases concerning Jewish families in Germany or occupied countries.

The decision to assemble these cases within one Section was due to the fact that all those concerned were exposed to the same risks. In accordance with the method followed at the Agency, this identity of circumstances called for the formation of a separate service. These people could no longer claim their nationality, which the German Government no longer recognized. The National Sections were therefore not qualified to deal with questions concerning them.

These cases had formerly been handled by the various National Sections, if the nationality was known, or by the CID Section, when the nationality was unknown or doubtful.

The principal lines of work of the IMPA Section were :

- (1) Immigration certificates for Palestine.
- (2) South American passports.
- (3) Handling of applications and opening of various enquiries.
- (4) Broadcasting.

(1) Immigration Certificates for Palestine.

In an attempt to delay the deportation of Jewish families, the IMPA Section adopted a form whereby the people concerned were told that some of them had been placed on Palestine immigration lists, and that others might be listed in due course. The text, which quoted a registration number, was then sent either by wire, by collective letter or by one of the message

forms used by the Agency, in the hope that these documents would enable those concerned to get the date of their deportation postponed.

The IMPA Section had, firstly, to co-ordinate all general information relating to registration on the immigration lists, and to verify the applications and entries recorded. In order to obtain this information, they applied to the various Jewish organizations such as the Jewish Agency, the World Jewish Council, the Palestine Office, as well as the Jewish communities.

The work done by the Section in regard to immigration certificates was considerable and required the most scrupulous attention to detail. The ICRC was determined that no means should be neglected to come to the help of the Jews living under a threat. Unhappily, as it might have been feared, the results did not correspond to the exertions made. Although the IMPA Section sent out many tens of thousands of immigration certificate numbers, only 285 people to their knowledge were able to benefit by these in practice.

(2) *South American Passports.*

The Section also had to deal with various questions connected with obtaining passports of South American and Central American States for Jews who wished to leave Europe.

(3) *Enquiries.*

From May 1945 onwards, after the close of hostilities, the IMPA Section began careful search for the people, with whom it had been concerned during the war. Since the people who were the subject of the enquiry had, in practically all these cases, disappeared without leaving any clue, the results proved of course sadly disappointing. Cases of deported children were very numerous and especially distressing.

(4) *Broadcasting.*

Since July 1945, the IMPA Section took part in the broadcasting of the ICRC¹, by publishing lists of survivors of concen-

¹ See p. 82.

tration camps, thus bringing to the knowledge of families, often themselves displaced, news of relatives from whom they had not heard for many years.

Finally, during 1947, trial broadcasts were made in the attempt to obtain information from survivors of concentration camps, who might possibly have knowledge of facts concerning those who had disappeared.

Internment in Switzerland

The Section of the Agency for cases of internment in Switzerland (called the "Internment Section") was organized in January 1942 to bring together for treatment, individual cases of military internees and refugee civilians in Switzerland. The following distinctions were drawn between the various categories of military internees and civilian refugees :

(1) *Military Internees* proper, according to Art. II of the Fifth Hague Convention of 1907.

(2) *Escaped Prisoners of War*, according to Art. 13 of the same Convention.

(3) *Military Refugees*. Such were, for instance, members of the Italian forces belonging to units disarmed by the German troops and who, feeling themselves to be in danger, had come singly or in groups to Switzerland, where they were interned.

(4) *Partisans*, mainly Italians who sought refuge in Switzerland, singly or in groups, sometimes accompanied by their relatives.

(5) *Deserters*.

(6) *Defaulters*, men having left an army they did not consider that of their country. This was the case of numerous Alsatians.

(7) *Hospital Cases*, sick foreign soldiers nursed in Switzerland in accordance with the terms of special conventions concluded with the States concerned.

(8) *Civilians*, comprising :

(a) *Emigrants*, provided with valid papers and a visa for a country of destination, and staying temporarily in Switzerland whilst awaiting an opportunity to continue their journey.

(b) *Civilian Refugees*: civilians without papers or with papers which had already expired, stateless persons, and others enjoying right of asylum.

(c) *Political refugees*, whose lives were in danger in their own country and who also enjoyed the right of asylum.

(d) *Persons passing through*, i. e. various civilians temporarily harboured in Switzerland¹.

These cases were entrusted, from 1942, to a separate Section, and no longer to the Agency's National Sections, for practical reasons and to remain in close contact with the Swiss authorities concerned, in particular the Federal Commissariat for Internment and Accommodation, the competent military authority for internment.

The duties of the Internment Section were the following :

(1) To receive and enter in card-indexes the information on military or civilian internees supplied by the responsible Swiss Authorities, or gathered from private sources.

In the case of military internees the Section itself sent identity cards bearing the ICRC heading to internment camps, for completion. These were accepted by the Swiss authorities as equivalent to the capture-cards used in belligerent countries. The Section further received from these authorities lists of transfers indicating changes of camp, removals to hospital and escapes, and also death certificates.

As regards civilians the Swiss authorities, on a request from the ICRC, sent the Agency copy of the identity card as filled up by each civilian refugee on entering Switzerland.

¹ The total number of refugees who came into Switzerland between the beginning of the war and December 31, 1946, amounted to 295,381 (103,869 members of the forces, 124,963 civilians and 66,549 persons passing through the country).

On the basis of this information the Internment Section kept military and civilian card-indexes, arranged according to nationality, up to date. In line with other special Sections it made out liaison cards for the National Sections concerned.

Communication of death certificates to the home countries of internees did not devolve on the Internment Section, but on the National Sections of the Agency.

(2) Reply to various enquiries made by internees or by their relatives.

When information in the Section's card-indexes was insufficient, enquiries were sent to National Red Cross Societies or to other organizations.

(3) Transmission of messages exchanged between internees and refugees and their relatives.

In exceptional cases, when internees and refugees could not correspond direct with their relatives owing to the suspension of postal communications between Switzerland and a particular country, permission was given for the use of the civilian message form, reserved in principle for exchange of news between civilians of enemy countries.

(4) Supply, on the request of the persons concerned, of official certificates of internment, to allow former internees to obtain arrears of pay, disablement indemnities, or relief allowances.

* * *

Up to 1943, the staff consisted of only two persons. The French internees of the 45th Army Corps, who came into Switzerland in June 1940, returned home after a short time, and the Section's main work at first consisted therefore in looking after the 13,000 Poles who came in at the same time and who remained in Switzerland until the war had ended. After January 1943, however, an increasingly large number of foreign civilians were allowed to enter Switzerland, and their identity cards were sent to the Central Agency.

The events of September 1943 in Italy accounted for the big development of the Section. A large number of British, Greek and Yugoslav service men, taking advantage of the collapse of the Italian forces, left their prison camps and succeeded in reaching Switzerland, followed shortly afterwards by a much larger number of Italians soldiers and civilians. In view of this influx of new refugees and the increase of work which it meant for the Section, the staff had to be considerably enlarged. It thus rose, in March 1944, to twenty-seven and at the moment of its greatest expansion, it had as many as forty-seven assistants.

During 1945 it was possible for almost all military internees and most civilian refugees to be repatriated. The Swiss authorities regularly sent the Internment Section nominal lists of service men repatriated and individual repatriation cards of civilian refugees. These repatriations had the effect of greatly reducing the work of the Section, which from September 1, 1945, ceased to exist ; its card-indexes were then divided amongst the various National Sections. However, up to the close of 1946, a secretariat of two persons continued to maintain liaison between the Agency's National Sections and the Swiss official bodies for treatment of special cases, and in particular for requests of certificates, as mentioned above.

Dispersed Families

One of the significant features of the later years of the recent war was the migration of large numbers of people from their own homes, under compulsion of many kinds ; some were captured by the enemy, some fled before the invaders, some had their homes devastated by the war : others were evacuated by order of the national or the occupying authorities, and there was also uprooting of populations and their resettlement, mass requisitions of labour, voluntary or forced emigration, and finally deportations for political reasons or on racial grounds.

These displaced people were, in large communities or singly, scattered to all points of the compass, without regard for law or order. Sometimes the injunction fell on a whole region ; sometimes individual persons were suddenly obliged to leave their homes and abandon their families who, in their turn and under the stress of other circumstances, were often swept away to unknown destinations.

The consequences of tearing these people away from their homes and thus breaking up family life, were further aggravated by the fact that the people so displaced found it difficult, if not impossible, to give any news of themselves for long periods. The disruption of family and other vital ties was inhuman and sometimes irreparable. It was essential therefore that effective measures should be taken to save a situation which might prove disastrous to thousands of people.

The ICRC has always considered that one of its principal duties in war time is to try to maintain and to re-establish family ties between persons separated by the events of war. In addition to work in behalf of PW, the Agency was concerned

with the problem of making search for the addresses of these civilians or their place of internment, or of forwarding news of them to their relatives. The account of the growth of that work and of the efforts of the Agency in behalf of several millions of civilians scattered throughout the world, is already known. The search for dispersed families was thus well within the general scope of the Agency's work.

* * *

In July 1943, the ICRC instructed the Central Agency to devise a standard enquiry card, by which persons who had been obliged to leave their home on account of the war could register and give details of members of their family whom they wished to trace. This was the card known as P 10,027. Whereas the ICRC was fully aware of the difficulties in store, it could not foresee at the time how far this enquiry card would be available to deported civilians and others who had had to flee the country. It was foreseen that in certain countries it would be necessary to await the end of the war before the displaced persons could complete the cards. However, the Committee took the view that all things considered, the system was the most suitable for the various categories of persons it was intended to help.

The usefulness of a card-index depends on its being complete in detail. The first problem was that of getting word to these dispersed people that they should register at Geneva and further, of convincing them that it was in their own interests to do this. The ICRC therefore decided to make the scheme known by a circular letter, on Dec. 1, 1943, to all National Red Cross Societies and other national or international organizations, which were likely to give practical help. It also sent details of the arrangement to its delegations abroad in order that they might inform Government authorities and ask for their support in the issue of the registration cards and in making known their use.

The Committee met with encouragement in its efforts by the replies it received and by the support given to it. A great many Red Cross Societies and organizations asked for supplies

of P 10,027 cards, printed in various languages, and by the spring of 1944, cards duly filled in began to reach the Agency.

In April 1944, at the request of AMGOT (Allied Military Government in Occupied Territories), the Committee sent a member of staff from the Agency on a mission to North Africa, Southern Italy, and Cairo. The object of his journey was to get in touch with refugee aid organizations in these countries and, with the help of Card P 10,027, to make a return of the number of the refugees and record the names of those from whom they were separated.

Thanks to the courtesy of certain Governments, cards were made available to the public in post offices. Supplies were also distributed to the offices which had been set up in some countries for the issue and forwarding of Red Cross Civilian Message forms. Local branches of Red Cross Societies, the centres set up by organizations such as the International Migration Service, the International Refugee Organization, and refugee relief centres also received supplies.

At the request of the ICRC, the International Postal Union granted free postage for the cards, a great advantage to senders.

The despatch of the cards to Geneva when filled in, either separately or collectively, met with difficulties in certain countries and for various reasons. When cards could not be sent by the usual postal route, the Committee's delegates consulted the authorities and the censorship offices as to other means of despatch, such, for instance, as the employment of special messengers.

The cards were only intended to be put to effective use when the war had ended. The plan was then to set about extensive searches in Germany and the German occupied territories. Nevertheless, the ICRC considered that the making of a central card-index for dispersed persons should not be delayed, and that it should be ready to serve its purpose as soon as circumstances allowed. To this end, a separate section, the Dispersed Families Section, was set up at the Central Agency.

From the start, the ICRC was aware of the need to assemble in one card-index all information and enquiries relative to members of dispersed families of all nationalities : in its opinion,

that was the only means of constructing a reliable record. The criterion of nationality generally used in the work of the Agency would, as far as displaced persons were concerned, no doubt prove a very unreliable basis of classification. Many of these persons and refugees in particular, had motives for concealing their nationality and even for claiming a nationality which they considered would be more advantageous to them. Therefore, a single international card-index, even if its construction entailed much difficulty, appeared to the ICRC as the only rational solution.

One of the principal difficulties which arose in setting up a central card-index resided in the fact that it was not possible to foresee future events and world conditions at the close of hostilities. The number of displaced persons in Europe at that time was estimated at 20 or 30 millions, and it was foreseen that the index would have to be greatly expanded if the scheme were accepted by all countries. This opinion was confirmed by events ; it did not seem that the European situation could develop with such rapidity and it could be assumed that displaced families in the occupied territories, separated by the fighting zones, would make extensive use of the registration card to become reunited. It was therefore necessary to provide all useful machinery, even if adjustments had to be made as the situation changed.

When forming the Dispersed Families Section, the Committee's sole aim was to re-establish contact between scattered members of a family. The field of its work had then to be limited to members of dispersed families—hence the name of the Section—and could not include all "displaced persons". With this in view, and in order to define clearly the term "dispersed families", the rule was laid down that the person making the enquiry and the person whose whereabouts were being sought must (1) both have left their usual residence and be unable so return home by their own efforts ; (2) be separated by a frontier and unaware of each other's address. The ICRC was still faced with a big task, as the number of persons belonging to dispersed families could not be precisely estimated, although it might be presumed that it would reach several million.

As soon as the Section had been set up, the National Sections of the Agency were instructed to communicate to it all cases of dispersed families in their files, in order to make the card-index of the section as comprehensive as possible.

The value of the central card-index under construction lay in the fact that it included all nationalities, but it was precisely in the making of this index that the problems arose. In some cases, members of the same family were living in different countries, of which they had become nationals and to the language of which they had adopted the spelling of their names. There were instances of five different nationalities within one family and several different spellings of the family name. To ensure that cards relating to the same family would come together in the index, a system of phonetic filing was needed, whereby all cards of the same name were assembled, whether they were Slav, Latin, Teutonic or English. Specialists were appointed to draft, on the basis of the experience gained by the Agency in this field, rules for the adaptation of the various pronunciations to French phonetic spelling.

Other difficulties were caused by illegible writing, bad spelling, incomplete or forged identity papers and the unknown origin of many small children.

Alphabetic and phonetic filing in one index had therefore to include the possibility of other filing methods at a later date, for instance, by nationality, place of origin, last residence, etc. The dispersed families card-index was therefore set up in duplicate, one on Watson Business Machine cards, in order to permit future re-arrangement.

* * *

As soon as UNRRA was formed at Atlantic City, in November 1943, the ICRC got in touch with this organization and informed it of the action taken by the Committee to solve the problem here discussed. The Director of UNRRA took formal notice of the communication on Dec. 14, 1943.

In the course of the subsequent negotiations, UNRRA asked the ICRC to operate as a central tracing bureau. This task

was accepted by the ICRC in the belief that it was being called upon to centralize the work of the national tracing bureaux set up by UNRRA.

Meanwhile, the ICRC, during a conference with UNRRA in Paris in the summer of 1945, was invited to come to an agreement whereby the Committee should, as soon as the military authorities gave their sanction, be ready to distribute its registration and tracing cards to the administrative officers of the Displaced Persons camps, especially those in Germany. Indeed, by far the largest number of DPs who had not yet been able to register with Geneva were presumed to be in Germany. This distribution however excluded former enemies, and could be made only to members of the Allied nations who had lost all trace of their family and who did not wish or could not return to their home country. The ICRC agreed to undertake this work, which was in line with its own earnest desire to extend its scheme for helping dispersed families ; at the time it stressed its regret that a whole category of DPs were thus excluded from the issue of P 10,027 cards.

On the strength of the arrangement concluded with UNRRA, the Agency arranged for the first million of these cards to be printed on a revised two-leaf pattern ; it had them conveyed to Germany with printed instructions to those in charge of the camps, together with the translation in several languages of the details printed on the cards.

The ICRC had now only to await the moment when it could begin the distribution in bulk of these cards in Germany, in accordance with the agreement reached in Paris.

The sanction of the Allied Military Authorities for the issue of the cards was however a long time in coming, despite repeated applications by the ICRC. Finally, UNRRA set up a Central Tracing Bureau, at the beginning of 1946 at Frankfort, which was later transferred to Arolsen, near Cassel, in the American Zone. The Allies recognized this Bureau as the sole competent body for dealing with cases of DP, thus including dispersed families in the arrangement.

The ICRC thus found that the project had been abruptly taken out of its hands, although in its opinion it was better

equipped than any other organization to carry out the scheme, on the grounds that it was a neutral body recognized throughout the world and therefore clearly in the best position to centralize information on dispersed people in all parts of the globe. There was now no prospect that the efforts of the Committee over a period of two years, could reach their aim, since there remained no likelihood that the Agency could issue the P 10,027 cards in Germany, where there was the greatest call for its scheme and where displaced persons, evacuated people, foreign workers and inmates in refugee camps amounted to millions. Had the ICRC been able to use in Germany the system it had devised, it can be claimed with some assurance that it would have obtained far-reaching results. In proof of this, mention need only be made of the Committee's action after the end of the war in distributing P 10,079 cards, designed to enable German families to get into touch again with relatives who were PW.

It therefore only remained for the ICRC to make the best use of the data in its possession, in order to give aid at least to those people whom it had undertaken to help. This was accomplished by co-operation with the UNRRA Central Tracing Bureau and by forwarding to it such information as continued to reach Geneva.

These are the statistics, up to the end of March 1946, of P 10,027 cards which reached Geneva duly filled in :

1944	76,300
1945	155,948
1946 (to March 31).	14,996
Total	<hr/> 247,244

These figures imply double the number of cases. The total number of cards printed, and in part actually issued was over three million.

The Section stopped work on card-indexing cases on April 1, 1946. The card-index made with Watson Business Machines cards was arranged alphabetically according to nationalities and placed in the records of the Central Agency. The cards of

the other index, comprising in particular P 10,027 cards filled in and returned, were filed in the indexes of the appropriate National Sections, which continued to deal with cases in arrears.

National Sections which were still receiving fresh enquiries, thereafter advised the senders to apply to the National Tracing Bureaux which UNRRA had set up in the various countries¹. The organizations interested in the matter were at the same time asked to discontinue despatch of such enquiries to the Agency, and to ensure that in future no more P 10,027 cards were distributed or completed. The ICRC then acted as the national Bureau for Switzerland.

The general public having been inadequately informed of the existence of the Central Tracing Bureau and the National Bureaux, the Central Agency still received in the course of the following months, a large number of enquiries and of P 10,027 cards. The National Red Cross Societies were therefore requested, in June 1946, to publish the necessary information in the press.

* * *

In July 1947, the International Refugee Organization took over from UNRRA all work in respect of DPs and the part of the ICRC in tracing and reuniting dispersed families was at an end.

¹ The Central Tracing Bureau set up by UNRRA had undertaken to deal with cases of stateless persons and with all those with which the National Tracing Bureaux could not deal.

A FEW FIGURES CONCERNING THE CENTRAL AGENCY
AS ON JUNE 30, 1947

NUMBER OF CARDS in the Indexes.

Austrian	480,000
Baltic	44,000
Belgian.	590,000
British	1,811,000
Bulgarian.	5,000
Colonial (French)	525,000
Czechoslovak	82,000
Dutch	289,000
Finnish.	2,000
French	5,893,000
German	9,451,000
Greek	125,000
Hungarian	337,000
IMPA	144,000
Internment in Switzerland	56,000
Italian	4,906,000
Japanese	208,000
Polish	780,000
Rumanian	119,000
Scandinavian	50,000
Spanish, Portuguese, Latin American	38,000
Sundry cases	115,000
U.S.A.	477,000
U.S.S.R.	215,000
Watson	8,574,000
Yugoslav	682,000

MAIL ITEMS

Received	54,500,000
Despatched	50,400,000*

* Including 23,858,000 twenty-five-word Messages.

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